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Leaves of Life

C. Neesw.

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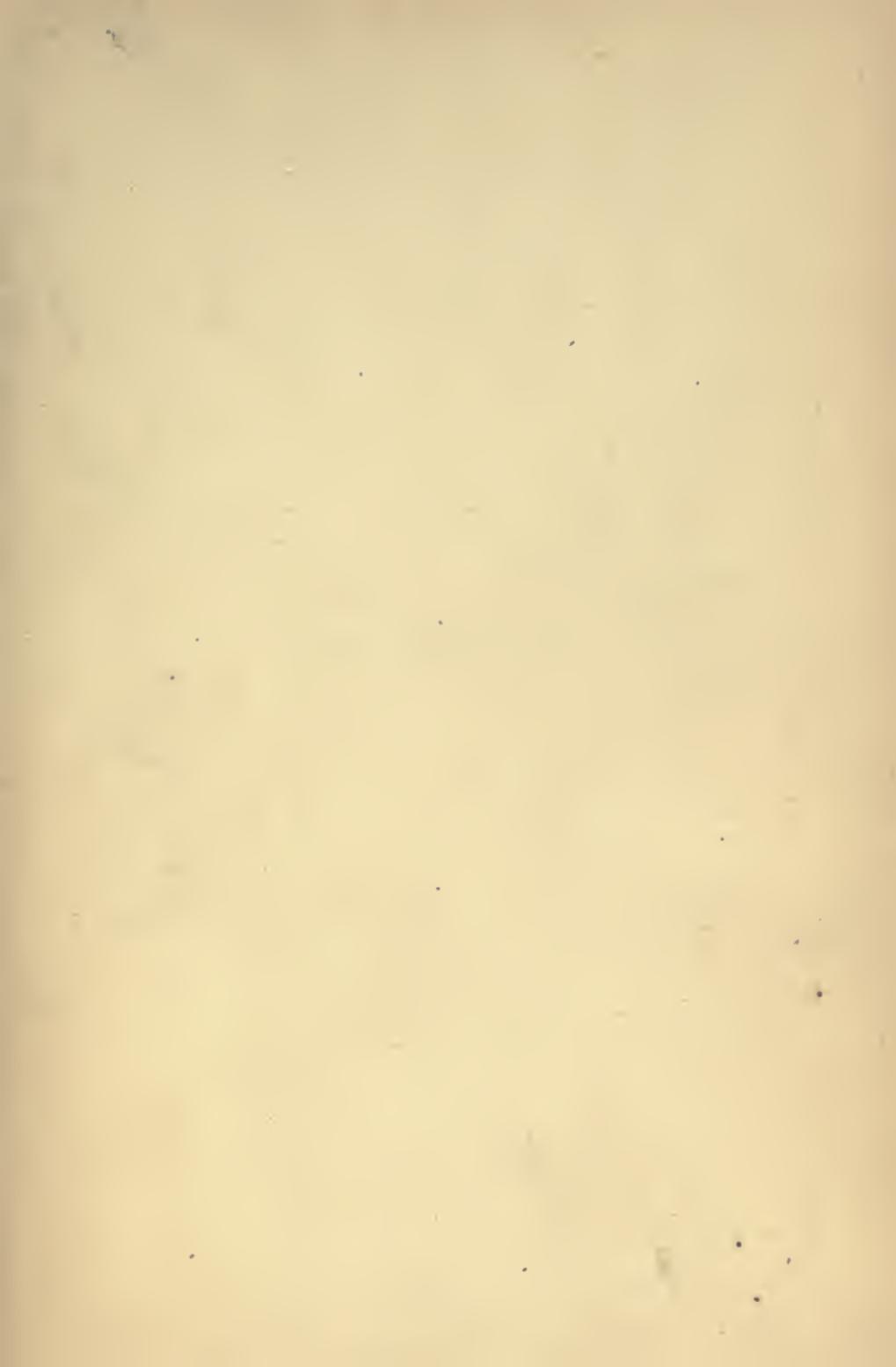
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Leaves of Life

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LEAVES OF LIFE

Whether at Naishápur or Babylon
Whether the cup with sweet or bitter run,
The Wine of Life is oozing drop by drop,
The Leaves of Life are falling one by one

BY

E. NESBIT *Bland*
" "

AUTHOR OF 'LAYS AND LEGENDS'



LONDON

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1888

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EDDA

SOME of these verses herein have appeared before in various periodicals. To the several editors and publishers I owe my thanks for the courtesy which permits me to reprint such verses here.

E. NESBIT.

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'The leaves of life are falling one by one'—

'The leaves of life are falling one by one'—

*And one by one the heavy hours fall past,
And the glad hours we prayed might ne'er be gone,
Are gone at last.*

'The leaves of life are falling one by one'—

*Old dreams, old friends, we watch them fall away;
And all our music takes a minor tone,
Our skies grow gray.*

'The leaves of life are falling one by one'—

*Best, worst, loved, hated, happy days and sad,
Each the inevitable course has run,
The present had.*

'The leaves of life are falling one by one'—

*Till, after all the gladness and the strife,
We see the redness of the setting sun
Light up our life.*

*And good seems not so good—ill not so ill;
And things look other than they used to seem;
Ourselves more vague, questions of fate and will
Less like a dream.*

*And then why leaves should fall we think we know,
Because the autumn comes before the spring—
The Eternal Spring, when flowers will always blow,
Birds always sing.*



EARTH AND HEAVEN.

[The mother of St. Simeon Stylites, hearing of his fame, came to see him, but was not allowed to enter the enclosure round the pillar. But when Simeon heard his mother's voice, he said to her, 'Bear up, my mother, a little while, and we shall see each other, if God will.' But she began to weep and to rebuke him, saying, 'Son; why hast thou done this? In return for the body I bore thee, thou hast filled me with grief. For the milk with which I nourished thee, thou hast given me tears. For the kiss with which I kissed thee, thou hast given me an aching heart. . . .' Simeon, on his pillar, was deeply agitated, and covering his face with his hands, he wept bitterly and cried to her, 'O, lady mother, be still a little while, and we shall see each other in eternal rest.' The poor mother, with harrowed heart, hung about the place for three days, crying to her son, and wrung with grief to see his terrible penance, . . . and at the end of those three days she fell asleep. . . And he weeping, said, 'The Lord receive thee in joy, mother,' &c.—*Lives of the Saints*, S. BARING GOULD.]

HERE Time is strange, and keeps no even speed
As once, but checked or sped by dreams, moves on :
Whether it was or was not so, indeed,
I hardly know; but some four days agone
I thought she came, came near the inclosèd space
Which men have walled about my pillar's base.

(O mother! In her eyes was all the woe
That has been gathering there these many years,
Since that first day, a thousand lives ago,
When she watched for me, racked with doubts and fears;
And I was lying at the convent gate
Awaiting the unfolding of my fate.)

And there she stood. They would not let her in.
She reached her hands out to me, and she cried,
And beat her breast and moaned. (Oh me! my sin!
This rebel soul not yet is sanctified !
Pardon, O God, that this weak heart did ache
With earthly sorrow for that woman's sake!)

And then I heard her voice : 'My son, my son,
Why wilt thou shame God's body in this wise ?
What is this sacrilege that thou hast done ?
How wilt thou meet the Blessed Mother's eyes,
And hear her ask thee what thou gavest me
For that fair body which I bore for thee ?'

Then cried I—God forgive, if I did ill—
'Bear up, my mother, yet a little while,
And we shall see each other, if God will.
Pray, pray still, ever pray !' And then (O vile !

To grieve for earthly things) I, also, wept,
As through my heart chill winds of memory crept.

And then I thought—and yet it may have been
Only a craft of Satan, tempting me—
I thought she wrung her hands, and let be seen
The mother's breast that once had nourished me,
And wept again, and spake ; and every word
Pierced to the fleshly heart of me who heard.

'Oh, son, I pray no more ! For once I prayed
A boon of God for sweetening of my days,
A little baby that should soft be laid
Upon my bosom—to His endless praise.
At last God heard my cry—thee did I bear,
The inexorable answer to my prayer !

'O little baby hands I used to kiss,
Cold, hard, and wasted—reached not out to me.
Mother of Christ, judge thou how hard it is
To bear such wounds as in his feet I see—
O little pink dear feet I used to hold,
Kissed now but by fierce sun and night winds cold !

‘Ah ! when I hushed thee on my happy breast
And sang thee whispered lullabys, and strove
To see the future—work, and help, and rest,
And good deeds done of thee, child of my love—
Why did no angel blast such sweet vain schemes,
And shed truth’s withering light upon my dreams ?

‘Thou wert God’s answer to my prayer. And thou,
Who bade thee thus to mar God’s gift and mine,
Thy body ? Not the Lord of heaven, I trow,
Who wore on earth a body like to thine.
He had a mother too ; yet day by day
Thou darest to raise thy hands to Him and pray !’

Then I spoke—I, not yet as saintly-still
As penance should have made me, beat my breast :
‘Patience, O lady mother ! If God will,
We two shall meet in an eternal rest !’
‘But, oh,’ she cried, ‘the human life divine
Was that in which God gave thee to be mine !

‘Not for another life than this I bore
Travail and agony of thy birth morn,
The joy unspeakable, that pain no more
Could touch or mar, when my man-child was born

For this life wert thou born—and, O my son,
With life, God's gift, what good thing hast thou done ?

'Thou hast brought souls to God ? Poor souls that find
No refuge save the God thou dreamest of !
A God who loves to see sad eyes wept blind,
Flesh wounded, and dead hearts cast out of love !
Better the heathen's life of soulless bliss
Than faith in such a Devil-God as this !

'What was it pricked thee on to this thy sin ?
What but desire that men should kneel and say,
" See—the great saint—the holy man, wherein
All fleshly lusts that sting our flesh to-day
Are dead"—Ay ! all but pride, that finds no ways
Too sharp to tread, to meet a sick world's praise.

'And now I know thou art too proud to heed
My voice—too high for me to reach thee there,
Too small a thing it is, my heart's great need,
That thou, my body's fruit, shouldst know or care ;
Thou, that wouldest save thy soul and heaven win
By slighting earth, that God has set thee in !

∞

‘Earth was thy home, on earth thy duties lay ;
And heaven lives on earth, in duties done.
O son, Christ weeps to see thee turned away
From that straight simple way He set thee on.
Thy soul? Thy soul ! The devil would not crave
That stunted crippled soul thou seekst to save !’

She ceased. Her body, like a drooping flower,
Bowed towards earth, and she was borne away ;
But I—have mercy, God—for one mad hour
I might not, would not, could not, dared not pray ;
For all her words shrieked in my ears again,
And all my penances and prayers looked vain.

The royal sun in robes of gold had passed
Below the rocks and palm-trees in the west,
The long hard shadow that my pillar cast
Grew dim and vague. The sense of coming rest
Fell on all happy living things, and I
Got strength to pray again, and night went by.

With the new sun she came once more. Her cry,
Strong with a night of prayer, I would not hear.
I turned my eyes up to the blazing sky,
Wrestling in prayer and sealing up mine ear.

Yet there she stood all day and gazed on me ;
For my heart knew it, though I would not see.

Another night of prayer, another day
Of words I would not hear though my heart heard.
And then that evening, when I heard men say
‘She is dead !’—O God, forgive my first mad word—
‘God, be my soul damned in hell’s fiercest pain,
But give my mother back to me again !’

But all the people crowded round. I knew
They waited for the holy man to speak.
What could I say to them—what could I do
To hide from them how wildly flesh was weak ?
I spoke—and what I said I know no more—
‘Twas not the thoughts with which my heart was sore !

I think I said what other men would say
I should have said—gave thanks to God that she
From this vile world had so been caught away
Into the glory where I hoped to be.
And this I said the anguish to conceal
I felt—but felt that it was sin to feel.

∞

But when the night had come, the people gone,
When 'twixt the silent earth and silent sky
I on my pillar was alone—alone
As I must be till life's last night pass by—
The world looked black, the sky was cloudy gray,
And even my pillar seemed to fade away,

And only I—'twixt heaven and earth—was there ;
For heaven I could not find, and earth was lost.
I seemed to drift through chill and misty air,
In vague cloud-depths by storm-winds driven and
tossed,
Still floating on—long ages did it seem—
I, more a shadow than man's lightest dream—

And still alone. At last—the darkness riven—
A light—a presence ! and my whole soul cried :
'I am lost, I am lost ! O God, where is Thy heaven
For which I gave up love and all beside ?
How shall I find the garden of the blest
Where Christ and all His angels feast and rest ?'

And then I heard a voice that filled the skies,
Most terrible, most sweet, and answered me :

'Heaven was on earth, the earth thou didst despise,
And now for ever it is lost to thee ;
And on the earth Christ is, and on the earth
The love thou hast accounted nothing worth.

'None for himself a heaven can win or make,
Since whoso seeks his life his life shall lose.
He who will labour for a sad world's sake,
And free pure life revile not nor refuse,
He is Christ's man ; he hath the better part ;
The angels dwell for ever in his heart.

'Where is a heaven but on the earth—for man ?
What other life for man is there but one ?
Heaven, and the way to heaven lie in that span,
Eternal are the done and the undone.
Thine were the penance, prayer, and sun and frost,
Thine the earth wasted, and the heaven lost !'

The vision faded, and I woke to earth ;
The night had fled away, the sky was fair
With lovely lights to greet the new day's birth ;
They shone upon my pillar high in air,
And on my body, maimed and seared, and thin
With the hard penance I have trusted in.

It is too late—too late! If this be true,
And all my life be wrong, at least I know
I did but what I thought God bade me do,
And went the way I thought He bade me go!
'Tis Satan tempts me with these dreams and fears.
'Twas he who tempted through my mother's tears.

Oh, mother, if it had been otherwise!
It could not be—life then had been too sweet!
How can smooth pathways lead to Paradise,
Or heaven be on earth, time being so fleet?
Back, Satan—I have fought and won the fight.
Life was so hard, it could not but be right!

WINTER VIOLETS.

To M. O.

DEATH-WHITE azaleas watched beside my bed,
And tried to tell me tales of Southern lands ;
But they in hothouse air were born and bred,
And they were gathered by a stranger's hands :
They were not sweet, they never had been free,
And all their pallid beauty had no voice for me.

And all I longed for was one common flower
Fed by soft mists and rainy English air,
A flower that knew the woods, the leafless bower,
The wet, green moss, the hedges sharp and bare—
A flower that spoke my language, and could tell
Of all the woods and ways my heart remembers well.

Then came your violets—and at once I heard
The sparrows chatter on the dripping eaves,

The full stream's babbling inarticulate word,
Theplash of rain on big wet ivy-leaves ;
I saw the woods where thick the dead leaves lie,
And smelt the fresh earth's scent—the scent of memory.

The unleafed trees—the lichens green and gray,
The wide sad-coloured meadows, and the brown
Fields that sleep now, and dream of harvest day,
Hiding their seeds like hopes in hearts pent down—
A thousand dreams, a thousand memories
Your violets' voices breathed in unheard melodies—

Unheard by all but me. I heard, I blessed
The little English, English-speaking things
For their sweet selves that laid my wish to rest,
For their sweet help that lent my dreaming wings ;
And, most of all, for all the thoughts of you
Which make them smell more sweet than other violets do.

AMONG HIS BOOKS.

A SILENT room—gray with a dusty blight
 Of loneliness ;
A room with not enough of life or light
 Its form to dress.

Books enough though ! The groaning sofa bears
 A goodly store—
Books on the window-seat, and on the chairs,
 And on the floor.

Books of all sorts of soul, all sorts of age,
 All sorts of face—
Black-letter, vellum, and the flimsy page
 Of commonplace.

All bindings, from the cloth whose hue distracts
One's weary nerves,
To yellow parchment, binding rare old tracts
It serves—deserves.

Books on the shelves, and in the cupboard books,
Worthless and rare—
Books on the mantelpiece—where'er one looks
Books everywhere !

Books ! books ! the only things in life I find
Not wholly vain.
Books in my hands—books in my heart enshrined—
Books in my brain.

My friends are they : for children and for wife
They serve me too ;
For these alone, of all dear things in life,
Have I found true.

They do not flatter, change, deny, deceive—
Ah no—not they !
The same editions which one night you leave
You find next day.

You don't find railway novels where you left
Your Elzevirs !

Your Aldines don't betray you—leave bereft
Your lonely years !

And yet this common book of Common Prayer
My heart prefers,
Because the names upon the fly-leaf there
Are mine and hers.

It's a dead flower that makes it open so—
Forget-me-not—
The Marriage Service . . . well, my dear, you know
Who first forgot.

Those were the days when in the choir we two
Sat—used to sing—
When I believed in God, in love, in you—
In everything.

Through quiet lanes to church we used to come,
Happy and good,
^d Clasp hands through sermon, and go slowly home
Down through the wood.

Kisses? A certain yellow rose no doubt
That porch still shows,
Whenever I hear kisses talked about
I smell that rose!

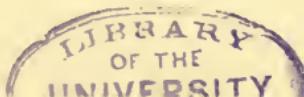
No—I don't blame you—since you only proved
My choice unwise,
And taught me books should trusted be and loved,
Not lips and eyes!

And so I keep your book—your flower—to show
How much I care
For the dear memory of what, you know,
You never were.

A YEAR'S COMEDY.

'TWAS April, when the brown birds sing
And woods with bursting buds are gray,
We sat and watched the face of Spring
Growing more lovely every day ;
But ere the woods were green, or half
The blue eggs hatched, one sunny morning
We found that we were made to laugh—
You at my love, I at your scorning.

When Summer with her rose ablaze
Passed over all the trancèd earth,
We found the sumptuous burning days
Too stately for such trivial mirth ;
And ere July had well passed by
We fell in love with melancholy,
And vowed that we were made to sigh—
I at my woe, you at my folly.



We walked among the beech-leaves brown
When Autumn crowned the hills with gold,
And as the leaves came drifting down
Love's story, needlessly, was told.
September's sun was gold above
The full earth's fruitful golden dower ;
We felt that we were made to love—
I to love you, and you your power.

But when by paths made still with snow,
By gray-brown, lichen-covered trees,
One happy day we chanced to go
Under blue sky and biting breeze,
You slipped, I turned ; a hand to give,
A hand to kiss—the play was over !
We knew that we were made to live—
I for my love you for your lover.

A DEFENCE.

To S. W.

A SINGER sings of rights and wrongs—
 Of world's ideals vast and bright,
And feels the impotence of songs
 To scourge the wrong or help the right,
And inly writhes to feel how vain
 Are songs as weapons for his fight ;
And so he turns to love again
 And sings of love for heart's delight.

For heart's delight the singers bind
 The wreath of roses round the head,
And will not loose it lest they find
 Time victor, and the roses dead.
‘Man can but sing of what he knows—
 I saw the roses fresh and red !’
And so they sing the deathless rose,
 With withered roses garlanded.

And some within their bosom hide
Their rose of love still fresh and fair,
And walk in silence, satisfied
To keep its folded fragrance rare.
And some—who bear a flag unfurled—
Wreathe with their rose the flag they bear,
And sing their banner for the world,
And, for their heart, the roses there.

Yet thus much choice in singing is :
We sing the good—the true—the just,
Passionate duty turned to bliss,
And honour growing out of trust ;
Freedom we sing, and would not lose
Her lightest footprint in life's dust.
We sing of her because we choose—
We sing of love because we must !

MORNING SONG.

BABY darling, wake and see,
Morning's here, my little rose ;
Open eyes and smile at me
Ere I clasp and kiss you close.
Baby darling, smile ! for then
Mother sees the sun again.

Baby darling, sleep no more !
All the other flowers have done
With their sleeping—you, my flower,
Are the only sleepy one ;
All the pink-frilled daisies shout :
'Bring our little sister out !'

Baby darling, in the sun
Birds are singing, sweet and shrill ;
And my bird's the only one
That is nested softly still.
Baby—if you only knew,
All the birds are calling you !

Baby darling, all is bright,
God has brought the sunshine here ;
And the sleepy silent night
Comes back soon enough, my dear !
Wake, my darling, night is done,
Sunbeams call my little one !

EVENING SONG.

SLEEP soft, my baby, all the world
Sleeps now, as you too should be sleeping
The sheep are still, the cattle rest,
Long since day slumbered in the west,
The sleepy daisy buds are curled
On lawns where glow-worms green are creeping.

Baby, sleep soft—I softly go
And leave you softly, softly sleeping ;
Wrapped in my love I leave you here
And, singing very softly, dear,
I sit beside the lamp and sew
And know you safe, in love's safe keeping.

Baby sleep soft—I do not fear
To leave you here—for all things love you ;
The wind goes whispering lullabyes,
And all sweet dreams have kissed your eyes ;
White wings light all the darkness here,
And all God's stars keep watch above you !

THE DEAD MOTHER.

SINCE you were tired and went away
We've brought you flowers every day ;
Now through your grass live daisies peer,
O mother, mother dear!

You used to listen every day
To everything we had to say;
But now we think you do not hear,
O mother, mother dear!

They say you are not very far—
But, since we cry, we know you are ;
We should not cry if you were near,
O mother, mother dear!

Mother—you know we sometimes cry
In the dark night, we don't know why ;
You would not let us cry for fear,
O mother, mother dear!

We think perhaps you did not know
Your little children loved you so,
Or you would not have left them here,
 O mother, mother dear!

If we are good we think that then
Perhaps you will come back again ;
Come in a week—a month—a year—
 O mother, mother dear!

O mother, mother, come to-day!
Why did you ever go away?
We are so tired of being here
 Without you, mother dear!

TWO LIVES.

I.

ONE stood with his face to the light ;
He held a sceptre of song
That ruled men's souls till they strove to the right,
And set their feet on the wrong.

' I am but a slave,' he said,
' The servant of man am I,
To sing of the life that is more than bread,
And the deaths that are life to die.

' And the might of my song shall sway
The millions who sit in shame,
Till they cast their idols of gold away,
And worship the true God's name.'

So he sang, and the nations heard
Through their drunken sleep of years,
And their limbs in their golden fetters stirred
As he sang to their drowsy ears.

Hope woke, in her spellbound bowers,
And gave heed to each clear keen word,
Till Love looked out from a net of flowers,
And called to his heart—and he heard.

And his song rose higher, more sweet,
As his dreams rose more sweet, more high :
‘ ’Tis Love shall aid me, and shall complete
The spell I shall conquer by !

‘ We two to men’s souls will sing,
And the work shall be ours, be ours ;
Together welcome the thorns that bring
More fruit than the sweetest flowers !’

But the woman he loved said ‘ No !
To me all your soul is due,
Can I share with a world, whatever its woe,
My heart’s one treasure, you ?

'There are plenty to sing of the right
And give their lives for the truth—
But you are mine, and shall sing delight,
And beauty, and love, and youth.

'For these are the songs men love,
These stir their dull brains like wine.
They hate the songs you were proudest of
In the days when you were not mine.

'And if for the world you sing
It will pay you with fame and gold,
And the fame and the gold to me you shall bring
For my heart and my hands to hold.

'Besides—what steads it to try,
One man against all the rest?
Let the world and its rights and its wrongs go by,
And hide your eyes on my breast !'

Then the man bowed down his head
And she crowned him with roses sweet ;
And he laboured for fame and bread,
And laid his wage at her feet.

And the millions who starve and sin,

He shut them out of his life

Where she was alone shut in—

His ruin, his prize, his wife.

And all that he might have been,

And all that he might have done,

These lie with the things that shall not be seen

For ever under the sun.

His children play round his knee,

But he sighs as they come and go—

For they speak of visions he cannot see,

In a tongue that he used to know.

He sings of love and of flowers,

And forgets what they used to mean

For gold is lord of his empty hours,

And fame of his soul is queen.

And the woman has long possessed

What she bade him win for her sake ;

But she holds with the gold accurst unrest,

And the fame with a wild heart-ache.

For the light in her eyes is dim,

Or dim are his eyes that gaze.

There is no light that can light for him

The gloom of his sordid days.

He will die, and his name be enrolled

Where marble makes mock of clay ;

(Oh, the pitiful clay, made brave with gold !)

And there let it rot away !

II.

One stood in the way of life

And said : 'I will serve and strive

And never weary of strife

For just so long as I live.

'The sum of service I'm worth

I swear it, beyond recall,

To the mother of all, the earth,

To men, the brothers of all.

'I have no voice for a song,
No trumpet nor lyre is mine,
But my sword is sharp, and my arm is strong :
Liberty ! these are thine !'

So he followed where high hopes led,
And he paused not for blame or praise,
But ever rejoiced to tread
The roughest and rightest ways.

He scorned ambitions and powers,
Delight was to him but a word,
Till Love looked out from a brake of flowers
And called to his heart, and he heard.

Then the man's whole soul cried sore :
'I am tired of patience and pain !
What if the lights that have gone before
Should be but visions and vain ?

8 'Why should my youth be spent
In following a marsh-light's gleam ?
Why should my manhood be content
With what may be but a dream ?

‘The sword I am used to wield
Is as much as my hands can hold,
I will turn aside from the battle-field
To the fields where men gather gold.

‘For while I carry the sword
I can hold neither gold nor you—
And the sword is heavy, and your least word
Is music my life sings to !’

‘But the woman who loved him spake,
She spake brave words with a sigh—
‘Rather than drop the sword for my sake
Turn its point to your heart and die !

‘It is better to die than live
If life means nothing but greed
To clutch the gifts that the world can give
And turn your back on its need.

‘And I have my life-work too,
A banner to bear have I ;
Shall my flag be dragged in the dust by you,
Who should help me to hold it high ?

‘ Hard looks life’s every line
When the colours of love are effaced,
But death would be harder, O heart of mine,
After a life disgraced !

‘ And what though we never see
Sweet Love’s sweet fruit at its best ;
My children’s play at your knee,
Your baby’s sleep at my breast ?

‘ Only one life is ours—
Shall we die with no world’s work done,
Having covered our shame with flowers,
And shrunk from sight of the sun ?

‘ No ! Be the sword for him,
Banner of light for me—
Voice at the heart when the eyes grow dim,
“ Liberty ! This for thee ! ”’

Then he bowed him low at her knees,
And she gave him the thorny crown
Which whoso wears knows no rest nor ease
Till Death bids him lay it down.

And they turned, and they passed away
To parting, and longing, and tears,
To carry the sword and the flag alway
Through the cold clean desolate years,

To work for the world, and to hear
When the long race nearly is run,
Like a voice in a dream, a voice most dear,
' Faithful and good, well done! '

And no man remembers his name,
Nor hers, who was never his wife.
Their names are written in letters of flame
In the book of eternal life.

MARCHING SONG.

‘O WHEREFORE do ye stand, a stern and steadfast band,
With your feet upon the pathway whence fame has turned
away?’

We hunger not for fame, nor heed world’s praise or blame,
Since fame and honour parted this many many a day!

‘What colour do ye wear—what banner do ye bear
When you turn your faces fightwards, and make your
weapons keen?’

Our banner’s folds are red as our blood, which we will
shed

Ere that again be suffered, which heretofore has been!

‘Whom, then, do ye befriend, whose cause do ye defend—
Are there any need such champions and fighting men as
ye?’

Our arms and hearts are strong, for all who suffer wrong,
And a world of woe can witness how many such there be!

‘But the golden calf stands high, and all its priests will cry,
“ Ye are heretics and outcasts if ye worship not as we”!
’Tis our only boast to-day that we worship not as they,
And to their cursed idol will never bow the knee !

‘ What do ye hope to gain by all your strife and strain?
Ye will win yourselves but bitterness, and bale, and bane,
and ban.’

Though we win all these and more, they outshine your
golden store

If they prove us unforgetting of the Brotherhood of Man!

‘ What armies fight for you, O ye who are so few,
O ye who are so few in a world that is so wide?’
The Spirits of the Light shall do battle for the Right—
And who shall be against us, if these be on our side ?

DEAD LEAVES.

Not Summer's crown of scent the red rose weaves,
 Not hawthorn perfume blown o'er bloom-strewn grass,
 Not violets' whispers as the children pass,
Nor new-mown hay, crisp scent of yellow sheaves,
Nor lilac perfume in the soft May eves,
 Nor any scent that Springtime can amass,
 Or Summer squander, such a magic has
As scent of fresh wet earth and fallen leaves.

For sometimes lovers, in November days,
 When earth is grieving for the vanished sun,
Have trod dead leaves in chill and wintry ways,
 And kissed and dreamed eternal summer won.
Look back, look back! through memory's deepening haze,
 See—two who dreamed that dream, and you were one!

AT THE GATE OF EDEN.

DEAR, so long through dusk or light
We have walked life's ways together,
Holding close when sun was bright,
Closer still in cloudy weather :
Blind with use, you hardly know
What it is that binds us so.

Just our clasping hands, my dear,
That cling close to one another,
These have linked us year by year,
And these fetters, and no other,
Bind us now—for good or ill
We are joined but by our will.

For our old love's sake—hold fast,
Tightly clasp—relaxing never ;

Hold with me, our heart-warm past
Loosed but once, 'tis lost for ever :
Then will rush 'twixt you and me
All the waves of all the sea.

Once divided so, we may
Strive our lives long, vainly, vainly,
To outface the surge and spray,
Touch, and see each other plainly :
Nothing done can be undone
While the earth spins round the sun !

I my arms may open wide,
You may nestle in my breast
Sated but unsatisfied,
Unpossessing, unpossessed :
Knowing that between our souls
All this sea of parting rolls.

Then regret will eat our heart,
Till despair devours regret,
Knowing we are more apart
Than before we ever met :

Most divided by that past,
When we held each other fast.

We shall sigh, when sighs are vain,
‘O, lost days that would not linger !’
You will rule your world again,
I shall sing—a soulless singer :
Each will look with longing eyes
On our foregone paradise.

Paradise, where now we stand,
Once lost, nothing can retrieve it ;
Still we hold it—hand in hand,
Must we lose it ? Need we leave it ?
It is ours, my sweet, to-day ;
Shall we go, or shall we stay ?

BEWITCHED.

ATTRACTED, repelled, and heart-sickened
By rhythmic delight and disdain,
Succeeding each other like wave-beats
On the storm-broken shore of my brain—
I hate you until we are parted,
And ache till I meet you again !

I would give up my hopes, ah ! how gladly,
If I could take yours, you my part—
I would give up my soul for your loving,
I would give up my life for your heart ;
Drop by drop I would drain all my blood out,
If each drop fell on you as a smart.

I desire you, despise you, deny you,
Am false to myself and to you,

I am false to the gods that I worship,
And could I, I would not be true.
To help you, or hurt you, or hold you,
There is nothing your fool would not do !

For the depths of the night and the silence,
Are alive with your dark malign face :
Your voice drowns all solitude's voices,
And your eyes—oh, your eyes !—are all space ;
And yourself is the heaven of my dreaming—
And the hell of my waking—disgrace.

You are Fate, you are love, you are longing,
You are music, and roses, and wine,
You are devil, and man, and my lover,
You are hatefully mine and not mine.
You are all that's infernal in loving,
And all that in hate is divine.

If raising a hand would efface you,
Ah ! trust me, a hand should be raised !
Ah ! had I the tongue that could sting you,
Who too long and too well have been praised !
Could I kindle the fire in your being,
That on my life's ruin has blazed !

I hate you, but hate you too little,
 You love me, but love not enough,
And your love, which I never shall quicken
 To a madness like mine, is pale stuff
For a star, yet you see how it leads me,
 Where the way is unlovely and rough.

And all would be nothing to suffer,
 If once at my feet you could lie,
And offer your soul for my loving—
 Could I know that your world was just I—
And could laugh in your eyes and refuse you,
 And love you and hate you and die !

THE KISS.

THE snow is white on wood and wold,
The wind is in the firs,
So dead my heart is with the cold,
No pulse within it stirs,
Even to see your face, my dear,
Your face that was my sun ;
There is no Spring this bitter year,
And Summer's dreams are done.

The snakes that lie about my heart
Are in their wintry sleep ;
Their fangs no more deal sting and smart,
No more they curl and creep.
Love with the summer ceased to be ;
The frost is firm and fast.
God, keep the summer far from me,
And let the snakes' sleep last !

Touch of your hand could not suffice
To waken them once more ;
Nor could the sunshine of your eyes
A ruined Spring restore.
But ah—your lips ! You know the rest :
The snows are summer rain,
My eyes are wet, and in my breast
The snakes' fangs meet again.

UNDER CONVOY.

Too many the questions, too subtle
The doubts that bewilder my brain !
Too strong is the strength of old custom
For iron convention's cold reign ;
Too doubtful the issue of conflict,
Too leafless the crown and too vain !

Driven blindly by wind and by current,
Too weak to be strong as I would,
Too good to be bad as my promptings,
Too bad to be valued as good,
I would do the work that I cannot—
And will not, the work that I could.

As a swimmer alone in mid-ocean
Breasts wave after green wave, until

He sees the horizon unbroken
By any coast-line—so I still
Swam blindly through life, not perceiving
The infinite stretch of life's ill.

But wave after wave crowds upon me—
I am tired, I can face them no more—
Let me sink—or not sink—you receive me,
And I rest in your arms as before,
Which were waiting, O Love, to receive me,
Fulfilling the troth that you swore.

And so you are left me—what matters
Of Freedom, or Duty, or Right ?
Let my chance of a life-work be ended,
End my chance of a soul's worthy fight !
End my chance to oppose—ah, how vainly!—
Vast wrong with its mass and its might !

Hold me fast—kiss me close—and persuade me
'Tis better to lean upon you
Than to play out my part unsupported,
My share in the world's work to do.
'Tis better be safe and ignoble
Than be free, and be wretched, and true.

And you think that you offer a haven,
As you do, for the storm-blown and tossed,
And you know not how under your kisses
The soul of me shrinks and is lost :
And you save me my ease as a woman,
—And the life of a soul is the cost !

TORCH-BEARERS.

DARK is the night ; and through its haunted shadows
We blindly grope and stumble—sometimes fall ;
No star is near enough to light the darkness,
And priest-lit tapers cast no light at all,
Save such a feeble and delusive glimmer
As night-lamps cast upon a sick-room wall.

Yet, each a torch we bear—lit or unlighted ;
Burning for self it is a marsh-light's gleam ;
Kindled for others 'tis the child of sunlight,
And darkness shrinks through twilight at its beam.
Were each torch duly lit, O world long darkened,
How would you bear the sudden light supreme ?

Vague dreams and vain ! See, thou who idly dreamest
Of what would be if every torch were lit,
See where thine own smoulders a wasted ember,
Thy torch—for noblest uses framed and fit.
Light thine own torch—and hold it to thy brother,
And his shall kindle at the flame of it.

TREASON.

I.

I HAVE loved him all my life, since life had a meaning
at all,

I loved him, I think, in my heart, before ever the sound
of his name

Ran through our student-ranks with the light and the
speed of a flame.

He was my hero ; I loved him for all that he had gone
through,

For all he had dared to be, for all he had dared to do ;
For all he had said and suffered, for all he had felt and
known,

And the fire in his soul was the same that lit the dim
lamp of my own.

O my hero ! my man who is all that I fain would be,
The perfect picture whose outline is traced so rudely in
me !

He has trodden the path I trod when I deemed myself
 lone in the way ;
He has striven, as I, through the night ; he has dreamed,
 as I, of the day ;
One faith in one fate has led the feet of us, lonely,
 apart ;
One infinite exquisite hope filled the void in his heart—
 in my heart ;
And by desolate wearyful ways we have journeyed at last
 to this place,
And he has not heard my name, and I have not seen his
 face.
Love needs no sight of his face : I know what his face
 will be—
The glass that the soul looks through—the soul that is
 one with me.
A Christ, who has borne our sorrows, upheld by a force
 divine ?
Give me the man of my nature, whose soul has been torn
 like mine,
Who, strong in his human weakness, out of the depths
 has passed ;
He is myself as I would be ! And now I shall see him
 at last !

Life has been hard. So it seems, when one tries to tell
how it sped,

A life made empty with losses, and cold as the lips of the
dead !

But to live, it has not been hard, being filled with
undying desire ;

And what is one's life but fuel, to feed the immortal fire ?

And what is one life to give—though one gives it the
hardest way—

For the sake of the splendid faith that lightens our night
of to-day ?

O for a thousand lives, to live out to the last sad
breath !

O for a million chances to agonise even to death !

The hardest thing in life is to know that life is so small,
So worthless a thing to give, though one's whole soul
gives it all !

I was born in a twilight world, where the wrong looks one
with the right

But I passed through the shadow of death, and my soul
came into the light.

How did it first begin—this hope that gives life its
worth ?

How does the Spring begin in the breast of the longing earth ?

The seeds are at work, at work, unseen of their master,
the sun,

Till they pierce through the heavy mould, and behold !
the Spring is begun.

So blindly at work in my soul the seeds of the new hope
were,

Till the sun of Freedom drew them to bud and blossom
and bear.

'I have but one life,' I said, 'and I know where that life
is due ;

O people, oppressed and trampled, I owe it, I pay it, to
you !'

For the core of the thing is this, though few perceive it
as yet—

We owe the labouring people a great unbearable debt.

The debt of all that we are, and all we are not, we
owe

To the people who toiled unknowing, that we untoiling
may know :

Our knowledge, our strength, our soul, our very body and
blood,

We owe to these who have made us, shaped us for ill or good,

And to them shall the debt be paid ; and all that they gave I will spend

For them. They have nourished me. They shall find they have nourished a friend !

A friend ? I will BE the people, one heart and one soul with these,

Who have lived hard lives and bitter, to give me a life of ease.

Their cause and my cause are one, and my cause and their cause are his,

Who gave up his youth to teaching the people the thing that is.

And he will come here. I shall show him my heart, he will show me his heart.

The world shall see two men together are more than two men are apart.

For this is the Holy Spirit, the union of men for the right,

The maker and giver of life, the soul and spirit of light.

II.*

It is not that he is not all I dreamed
—O, more than all I ever dared to dream :
It is not that the splendour that he seemed
Is dwarfed by nearness to a tawdry gleam :
It is not that I am not glad, and filled
With wine of joy his presence has distilled :—
It is a foolish fever of the soul
That burns and shivers, and will not be stilled.

It is not doubt ! Doubt ! when my every thought
Commends him that his is not otherwise.
Each word of his with fervent force is fraught,
And the world's light is in his earnest eyes,
And at the moment when he spoke my name
Our natures met and blended—flame in flame !
His was my ¹youth, and mine his larger view
—His surer vision and more perfect aim.

It is not fear nor sadness nor unrest
That frets my soul and gnaws perpetually;
Is it a doubt if I who give my best
Remain his debtor still too utterly ?

No—I give all—and know that in his eyes
The loving heart best decks the sacrifice ;
And my poor all—with all my heart thus given—
For all he needs from me, shall well suffice !

Stay—here's his story. Noble, rich, and young,
Learned, as the young are learned, in books, not
men—
With youth's great-small ambitions he had strung
Life's harp that gave him music back again—
The music that is sweetest to man's ear,
Until that other song he comes to hear,
The harmony of visions, and he knows
No other music ever can be dear.

He heard the heavenly song, and then he knew
How, listening for its echo in his life,
He too must learn and labour, live and do—
Through patient waiting, and glad easy strife.
He trod the quiet, bitter, cruel way,
Worked patiently for many a weary day
Among sad brothers sick with sordid cares,
Till Time should give him leave to say his say.

Two years of weeks of days of hard dull toil !
With no sweet restful speech to lighten it :
One in a workshop—one upon the soil ;
And then it seemed the time was ripe and fit.
He spoke—men listened, and his voice and eyes
Turned slaves to men—made patriots out of spies,
And, as spreads water over level land,
His spirit spread o'er men, to make them wise.

And hope sprang up, through tangled growth of fears,
And splendid dreams lit up the night like stars,
Making wild rainbows through men's lifelong tears
That mocked the strength of tyrants' prison-bars ;
And Liberty flung glory over shame,
And walked beside men in the furnace flame,
And life seemed worth the living, and desire
Within a vision of completion came.

Then ruin ! On a sudden—who knows how ?
Some spy, whose name the devil were sick to
speak,
Sold his own soul for power to break his vow—
And, as a wave foams up a rocky creek,

Rushed on them loss, disaster and despair,
And death of faith—more hard than all to bear ;
 And he awoke from all those dreams of his—
An exile, with a crown of thorns to wear.

(O crown of thorns, more dear than any crown,
 Save victory's, that on men's brows is laid !
This thou hast woven, O Freedom, for thine own—
 With this our utmost pain is overpaid !
And, for the other crown, we know, we know
That while we wear the thorns, the laurels grow,
 And on some head that wins thee shall be laid,
When these poor hearts that love thee, are laid low.)

An exile, with a crown of thorns for prize,
 Had I been he, I might perhaps—who knows ?—
After the winter of strife and sacrifice,
 Have sought to wreath my thorn-crown with the rose ;
Have known a bitter, blind, and wilful hour,
 When all the world showed but one fruitless flower,
 And in that hour I might have gathered it
For my wrecked heart's uncompensating dower.

He? What he did? He slowly, slowly grew
Accustomed to believe that all was lost;

He knew, perhaps, that high dreams bud anew,
In spite of time, and fate, and wind and frost,
But he was weary, and he chanced to meet
A woman very fair and very sweet ;
And he was right, as always, when he laid
His broken life at her belovèd feet.

O, she is fair, with wonderful gold eyes
That deepen' into brown, or gleam to green,
And slow sweet speech, that softens into sighs—
Sighs that her laughter ripples in between ;
And when she speaks he hears his own soul's cry
Through those soft scarlet lips of hers, and I
Hear his own voice by some sweet echo rendered
That ever makes me sad—I know not why.

He came back to us here because he heard
In some electric flash across the sea
Of hope re-risen here : and at the word
He came, new named, for Freedom's sake to be
A slave in those same chains which once he wore,
Came back to love and labour as before,
Strive as before to reach the goal we see,
And—grant it, Liberty!—to fail no more!



And when we sit and talk, as talk we do,
Often, true friend to friend, the heart laid bare,
She smiles at us, and drops a word or two
That fits his mood as sunshine fits clear air ;
And he is glad to the sound core of him,
And life's sweet cup fills to its golden brim,
To see her eyes shine with reflected light
From the one Light that never can grow dim.

It must be sweet, that fellowship and faith—
That love for love—that passion and that trust
That she, as he, is faithful even to death,
That she, like him, esteems all gain as dust,
And only labours for the glorious goal,
For the freed body and enfranchised soul :
To one dear end vows every part of life,
And, with unspeakable content, Life's whole.

And so we talk, contrive and plan and scheme,
That what once failed, may fail not to succeed;
How to convert the yearning to the dream,
How to translate the dream into the deed ;

And when at last the time shall come, we three,
One now in soul, shall one in action be.

So says he—and she smiles ; and I . . . O God,
If one must be a traitor, damn thou me!

III.

It is not I! It is not he. But she.
'Twas that that sickened all the soul of me.
I felt betrayal in the very air,
Not naming it. The worst there is to bear
I know, to the inmost soul. What I shall do ?
With just as little doubt I know that too.

How hot the world is, suddenly! I rest
My head against the night's vast quiet breast ;
Across the plains the night air blows this way,
The green fields round the town look cool and gray,
Chill looks the earth—but I can feel its heat
In my parched lips and burning pulse's beat
Hot, hot as hell, wherein I must abide,
The world within mocking the world outside.

For many weeks our plans had all been laid,
Only the time when movement could be made
Remained unfixed.

‘It may be years,’ said he,
‘But we are patient—however long it be!’
‘It may be ere to-morrow’s dawn shall break,
But we are ready, are ready!’ so she spake.
And I said, ‘Freedom triumphs! Hope endures,
Fed by such fervour and such faith as yours.’

And then I heard a word how all was fit
To aid our plan and our unfolding it.
I hurried to my friend to tell him all,
Glad to the soul of the long longed-for call
‘To work!’ I found them sitting silently,
Watching a splendid blood-red sunset die.
They turned and smiled at me: a quiet mood
Was on them, when peace seemed the deepest
good,
And rest and love and happiness seemed right
In a disconsolate wronged world’s despite.

I spoke my tidings. ‘You and I will go
And sow the seed upon the field we know,

And she the harder task shall do, and wait
To see what fruit is raised from it by fate;
Shall hold the threads of all our lives within
Her hands, and give the signals "Lose!" and "Win!"
And now comes parting, and new life, new pain
For us, who, maybe, shall not meet again.'

His eyes showed lightning.

'O, I knew,' said he,
'Life was not over yet, for you—for me.
I can work now—a work that may repay
For these five wasted years I have thrown away.
Intensity may compensate for time,
And new strong hope shall expiate my crime—
Despair, the blackest crime that stains man's soul.
And you, my brother, friend, myself still strong,
Who have hoped, nor once despaired these five years
 long,

O, you are glad, as earth is glad of flowers,
Of this great good, and glorious chance of ours
To work, perform, achieve, retrieve, repair,
Justify hope, annihilate despair!'

He reached his hands out to me as he spake,
With face all radiant for the new joy's sake ;

Born leader of men, born chief of enterprise,
With the deep voice and strong magnetic eyes ;
More than all others, fit and sure to lead,
To teach the soul the thought, the hand the deed !

She had sat silent, statue of repose,
Harkening to all our words from first to close.
Now—while he stood transfigured there—she rose.
Then, as he turned to her, she thundered

‘ No !

By all our love and joy, you shall not go !
You swore yourself to me—to me. The vow
Shall firmly hold, and save you for me now.
Your safety and my love, my Love, are worth
A million times the million dreams of earth.
Let him go ! What he does or does not do,
Who cares?—but all I am holds life from you.’

He did not speak. I spoke :

‘ But you have said
A thousand times . . . ?

‘ My lies upon my head,’
She cried to him. ‘ What is it I would not do
Or say, if saying or doing pleased you ?

Has it been hard to act this patriot's part
These years long—prompted by a steady heart
To seem the thing you wished me, and to be
In soul more strong than you could fancy me ?
I have lied for all these years—save in such word
As love has whispered, and you alone have heard.
Freedom ? A name ! The people ? None of them
Worthy to touch my lover's garment-hem !
Plenty there be are good enough to die
The deaths that Freedom must be purchased by ;
But nothing that the world could gain could pay
For your one life, if that were thrown away.
I have kept silence, I have spoken and lied,
That you most fully might be satisfied.
But now the time has come for speaking true,
For saying what you shall and shall not do.
Vain words he wastes, this foolish boy, your friend,
To me your life is vowed till life shall end.
Judge you what honour Freedom will confer
On him who breaks a vow to follow her !
What ? Urge dishonour and a broken vow ?
These were not things you willed for him till now !
Urge him, entreat—in any words you know.
I hold his heart ; I say he shall not go !'

She flung an arm across his neck. And he
Half moved his lips—yet never spoke to me.
She spoke. ‘To-morrow he will speak to you !’
I came away.

O, I am patient too !
I waited till I heard what he would do.
To-day this came :

‘*Forgive her, forgive me !*
O more than brother, right is hard to see,
And mine eyes blind. Life’s maze has many a turn.
Only this much unclouded I discern—
A vow is sacred. So—I yield. For she
Claims to the uttermost the soul of me.
But you—go on ! It shall be given you
To do the deeds I was too weak to do.
Some day, perhaps, she may believe as I—
As you. Till then, O more than friend, Good-bye !’

So the dream’s ended !

Now comes action’s turn.
What must I do ? These scanty tears that burn
Like fire along my face—heart of my heart,
These are for you, for me, since we must part ;
But all the other fire that burns me through

Is for the future. What remains to do ?
How end the contradiction of his life ?
All high dreams crushed—a woman and a wife
Set in the place that Freedom once was in !
This is the one unpardonable sin,
Or were, if I should suffer it. I hold
The keys of fate, of issues manifold.
'If she were dead, he would be ours again.
How those four words danced through my dizzy brain
Last night ! Now within my weary head
Another phrase keeps time—*'When she is dead.'*
His sensuous nature will be sad awhile,
To miss her face and eyes, her voice and smile ;
But the true self will conquer, and the man
Will do the work—the work none other can.
And she has played a game for heavy stakes,
And wins the sleep from which none ever wakes.
And I—gain nothing—but the world shall gain !
Weigh, now, and balance ! Venture or refrain ?
Refrain—have pity—go my working way,
And hope to see the face I love, some day
After long years—when somewhat we have won—
To hear him say, ‘What I, too, might have done
If . . . ’

What a hope to feed the empty years !
Venture ! A sharp brief pain, some short-lived tears
For him. For me renouncement of my land,
Of all my right to hold him by the hand ;
Of all my chance of seeing him some day,
When all those shadows may have passed away.
For him a splendid future (when his hand
Alone shall execute what both have planned.
So that the travail shall not be in vain)—
Sad, but not sorry, triumphing through pain !
This for the man I love ! This may I give ;
Its price my death—and, dying, I shall live,
If by some glorious death I yield my breath
Making of life a hymn—a song of death.

IV.

He is set free ! And she is dead.
Mine were the hands her blood made red ;
Mine were the eyes that saw her breast
Heave like a little child's at rest ;
Mine was the touch that changed the deep
Soft breathing beauty of her sleep

Into a horror that will cry
Against me till the day I die !
She looked so fair, so sweet, so good,
I almost blessed her as I stood
Grasping the knife that was to end
Her life, save honour, free my friend.
O friend, it was for you, for you
I paid this hard deed's heavy due !
I struck—her eyes shone—and she cried
'Traitor !' I struck again—she died.
And we were in the room alone—
I, and the deed that I had done !

I fled—but all along my flight
Through vastness of the empty night,
One face pursued me like the ghost
Of all that man has ever lost ;
Not her face—dead and white and fair,
But his—when he should find her there !

It will not hurt ! Not long, not long !
Soon the vast press of world-wide wrong,
And the great glory of the deed
Wherein he only can succeed

(The leading of the people), will
Outface for him this dream of ill.
Pass quickly, certain storm of tears !
And leave clear light for other years,
Years whose fair fruits I shall not know.
I go to strike some sterner blow,
To lay some butcher-tyrant low,
And die right gladly, dying so.

And when, through him, the day is won,
And men are free beneath the sun,
None shall remember them of me
Who gave my life that this might be.
In a dishonoured grave will I
Lie down—contented there to lie,
Dying most glorious and most glad.
This was the one chance that I had—
I took it ; I have set him free
And played my part out worthily ;
And yet—his face, his anguished eyes—
O brother, could I otherwise?

Who's this ? A friend ? The password ? Right!
What ? You have travelled all the night

To find me, and you say you bear
News from the city? I was there
But yesterday. How goes it? Say,—
Is there fresh news since yesterday?
His wife is dead? And he . . . No, no—
By heaven, you shall not cheat me so
Of my life's wage! he is not dead—
He is not dead—but ill may be,
With drinking grief too greedily.
Soon that will pass—and he will do
The work she has released him to.
He is not dead.

Then tell me why
Your face is wrenched with agony?
What is the worst? You loved him, too?
Speak—or I'll tear it out of you!

No—no! A lie! You said that thing
To punish me for threatening!
It was not true, that thing you said—
That he went mad to see her dead!
It *is* true!

Then, if God there be,
How he must laugh to think of me!

THE SAILOR'S WIFE.

'O, THE wind is cruel and keen and cold,
It is raging over the marsh and the wold
As if it would tear you out of my hold.

'Molly, hold fast ; we shall soon be there,
Where the room is warm with the fire's broad flare
(Where the silence is, and the empty chair.)

'The way is long from the sea and the town ;
(This is the wind to wreck and to drown ;
It blew the night that his ship went down.)

'Hold up—that light, like a red red star,
Shows where the fire and the curtains are
(The mad waves roar through the night afar).

' O, the wind, how it drives! we can hardly stand.
How it whistles and shrieks over sea and land!
Keep close, hold tightly to mother's hand.

' Sweet rest for my little ones soon will be !
(And for him his rest in the restless sea,
And the ache that is never at rest for me).

' The sheep on the wold show dully white
Against the darkness—I have you tight.
O God, keep both of my lambs to-night !

' We shall soon be home—we will shut the door,
And the wind shall not get at us any more.
(O, the shout of the surf on the far-off shōre!) '

They have reached the door, they are safe inside ;
The wind wails over the trees and the tide
As it wailed and shrieked on the night he died.

Warm, lonely and firelit the cottage is.
Lonely! Then who and what is this—
Whose voice, whose arms, whose tears, whose kiss ?

Ah, whose but his all her soul had stirred?
What their hearts said only the angels heard,
For they held each other without a word.

For there is not a word that is not vain
When out of the darkness and night and pain
Two lovers come to each other again.

ON DIT.

COLD is the wind—the flowers below,
 Fearful of winter's hand, lie curled ;
But Spring will come again you know,
 And glorify the world.

Dark is the night—no stars or moon ;
 But at its blackest, night is done,
All after hastens to the noon,
 The triumph of the sun.

And life is sad, and love is brief.
 Be patient ; there will be, they say,
New life, divine beyond belief,
 Somehow, somewhere, some day.

SWEET SUMMER.

THE spring has fled with its shine and shower,
And summer reigns, in the radiant hour
When noon burns sweetness from every flower
That turns its face to the sun.

She reigns in the waning blue of the skies,
When the lovely light of the evening lies
On pastures golden with memories
Of dear dreams, over and done.

O summer, royal crown of the year,
Beyond faint spring and wan autumn dear,
Hope and remembrance are all they bear,
But joy is the soul of thee—
A soul that stirs in the unripe corn,
In the dewy hush of the new sweet morn,
When in leafy woods soft echoes are born
Of the far-off song of the sea.

O summer, sweet summer, when lovers stray
Past the green mill-pool by the shady way,
Through the fields soft-wreathed in the new-mown hay,

And down through the leafy lane ;

When as daylight lessens the old folks stand
And look out over the quiet land,
And sigh (not sadly, if hand clasps hand)

That youth comes never again !

For the summer dies—as our youth must die,
And vain are the prayer and the passionate cry,
The roses and beautiful days go by

With all their wonder and worth ;

And snows are over the lily's head,
And a sheet of ice on the rose's bed,
And love may die, now the leaves are dead

And winter is lord of the earth.

Yet listen, sad heart, to the glad refrain
Of the brown-winged birds in the brown-hedged lane ;
Summer has gone, but she comes again !

Sweet summer never can die.

And youth, sweet youth, is immortal, too,
And will bloom again as the roses do,
And love is eternal, and lights life through,

Though youth and the rose go by.

NIGHT AND MORNING.

I. NIGHT.

WHILE yet the woods were hardly more than brown,
Filled with the stillness of the dying day
The folds and farms and faint green pastures lay,
And bells chimed softly from the gray-walled town.
The dark fields with the corn and poppies sown,
The dark delicious dreamy forest way,
The hope of April for the soul of May—
On all of these night's wide soft wings swept down.

One yellow star pierced through the clear, pure sky,
And showed above the network of the wood,
The silence of whose crowded solitude
Was broken but by little woodland things
Rustling dead leaves with restless feet and wings,
And by a kiss that ended in a sigh.

II. MORNING.

The wind of morn awoke before the line
Of dawn's pearl haze made pale the eastern sky,
And woke the birds and woodland creatures shy,
And sighed night's dirge through tremulous boughs
of pine.

The north and south sky flushed, and the divine
Rose-radiance touched the moorland lone and high,
While still the wood was dusk, where, by and by,
Splendid and strong the risen sun should shine.

It shone—on two that through the woodland came
With eyes averted and cold hands that clung,
And weary lips that knew forbidden things,
And hearts made sick with vain imaginings—
And over all the wood its glory flung,
The wood—that never more could be the same.

TO OUR LADY.

(FOR A PICTURE BY GIOVANNI BELLINI.)

DEAR MOTHER, in whose eyes I see
All that I would and cannot be,
Let thy pure light for ever shine,
Though dimly, through this life of mine !

Though what I dream, and what I do,
In prayer's despite are always two,
Light me, through maze of deeds undone,
O thou whose deeds and dreams are one !

And though through mists of strife and tears,
A world away my star appears,
Yet let Death's sunrise shine on me,
Still reaching arms and heart to thee !

REFUGIUM PECCATORUM.

For all human things do require to have an ideal in them . . .
were it only to keep the body unputrefied.—*Carlyle*.

OUR Lady's chapel is ablaze with light
That burns against the close-pressed face of night ;
The echo of long centuries of prayer
Is mingled with the incense in the air,
And every soul that once breathed there a vow
Joins with the souls of those who pray there now.

And there, within the taper's softened glow,
Amid the flowers that in girls' gardens grow,
The lovely image of the Mother stands—
Stands with her little baby in her hands,
And in her eyes, and in her perfect face,
The eternal promise of ideal grace.

A woman, passing down the quiet street,
Heard sudden sound of singing voices sweet

'That seemed to call her in from out the night
To where it rose, through floods of softened light.
The music caught and held her sense as fast
As souls are held by fetters of their past.

O Mother-maiden—what a woman-face !
Sordidly sensual, unlovely, base,
Scored with coarse lines burnt in by years of wrong,
Stamped with the signet of the vile and strong ;
Hopeless, impure, with eyes unwashed by tears
Through many soulless, desecrated years.

She sat there stupid, broken, lost, defiled,
Before pure mother and ideal child ;
She on whose barren breast no little hand
Had ever rested in divine command,
She who had never known the unnamed bliss
Which thrills a mother through her baby's kiss.

How strange and sweet that music was ! She heard
The clear note of a long-forgotten bird—
A certain thrush which used to come and sing
Upon the sweet-plumed lilac in the spring
When she was young, and there was time to think
Of other things than devilry and drink.

That cottage garden—with its hollyhocks
Each side the porch—its gray and purple stocks,
The sweetbriar hedge, the climbing yellow rose,
How long it was since she had thought of those !
Such memories quickly fade in gaslit hours,
'Mid patchouli and tawdry hothouse flowers.

There was a church at home—she minded well
Its ghastly tales of sin and death and hell ;
Yet it was pleasant in the summer days
To walk there through the quiet meadow ways,
And through the cornfields where the poppies grow—
Or grew once—bright as life seemed, long ago.

And then the churchyard on the thymy hill
Where the bees murmur and the world is still,
One grave is there wherein there buried lies
Something beyond a mother's heart and eyes :
A woman's soul—her soul—might have been spared
Had there been any one on earth who cared.

Hark—some one's speaking ! Listen, what says he ?
' In that dear Heaven, where we all may be,
A lady sits with the divinest eyes
Whose starry depths are still with Paradise.

She sits and looks upon this world of ours
And sees alike its sunshine and its showers.

'And all her heart is overfull of love
For this poor world she knows the hardness of ;
And when we are sad, she sighs and longs to rest
Our aching heads on her divinest breast ;
But when we sin, she weeps we are beguiled
So far from her and from her little child.

'She weeps for us who sin—how can we dare
In such a mother's heart plant grief and care ?
She who is all we might be if we would,
Lovely and loving, gracious, great, and good ;
Only not happy—how can she be glad
While all men sin, and, sinning, are made sad ?

'But saddest tears of all are those that rise,
Through the clear radiance of those crystal eyes,
When women sin—the women who might be
Mothers as pure or maids as clean as she ;
Women whose souls might be as chaste and clear
As the calm eyes of her, divine and dear.'

• • • • •

The worshippers had slowly passed away,
And one by one turned to their work or play ;
And one by one the dying tapers left
The church of all its golden glow bereft :
Only, before our Lady's altar, one
Love-lighted little twinkling taper shone.

Still with that peace which is the smile of God,
The priest along the empty chapel trod,
When—Is the chapel empty? then what stirred
The silence with that half-articulate word ?
What breathed? Who sobbed? And what hand has
he passed
Thrust through the darkness, caught, and held him
fast?

'Is it all true—about the Paradise,
And the dear lady with the crystal eyes,
And all her tears and loving—is it true ?'
This is a woman speaks—a woman, too,
Whom shame and sin have crushed and pressed awry
From all her possible peace and purity.

'It is not true—speak, is it true ?' she cried.
'True as your sorrow, child,' the priest replied.

' But not for me—she does not weep for *me*,
Unworthy even of her memory ?
She weeps for those who do a little wrong,
Not me—who outraged her my whole life long.

' She weeps the most for those whose hearts most bleed.'
' Then, O my heart, she weeps for us indeed.
So, I can not go back. It shall not be
That she shall ever weep again for me.
O save me, save me ! once that threshold crossed,
Her crystal eyes must weep me—doubly lost !

Outside the church the night pressed closely round,
Dark as despair, as wide and as profound.
Within, the one small taper kept at bay
All evil dreams that through the darkness stray.
' Here shall you stay—safe, and no longer sad,
Since o'er your soul God's angels have grown glad.

' Before our Lady's altar kneel and pray,
Counsel of light will come with light of day,
And point us to some pathway, wherein you
May leave your past, and shape your life anew,
Fit for her eyes to see. Her mother-care
Shall keep your future undefiled and fair ! '

Before our Lady's light all night she lay
Too passionately penitent to pray ;
Only within her heart the waves of woe
And joy went agonising to and fro.
'Thou lovest me. I am safe beside thy feet.
Have pity on me—Mother-maiden sweet.'

The morning sunrise glorifies the face
Of Mary, Mother of ideal grace,
Touches the poor soiled face that has grown gray
Through rouge the tears have but half washed away ;
She does not weep now—does not breathe nor stir,
The Maiden Mother has had pity on her.

THE BETTER PART.

'Tis weary treading every day
The same dull, dreary, uphill way,
While the desired and the divine
So fair and far above us shine—
As unattainable as dear
To us who grope and stumble here.

'Tis hard to hold our flag on high,
And never faint, until we die—
To spread our banner on a wind
Scented with garlands left behind :
To give up all life's joy, that we
May humble banner-bearers be.

'Tis hard to sing, in faith, of light
Through endless-seeming hours of night—
To tune the harp, the voice upraise
For Freedom's sake, for Honour's praise—

To sing of good that *is*, not *seems*—
To sing of duties, not of dreams.

'Tis hard to fix one's sleepy eyes
On faint, faint streaks of new sunrise,
When all one's being yearns to weep
Its tiredness out, and turn to sleep :
Sleep and forget, and cease to care
If sunrise be, if darkness were.

'Tis weary fighting all one's life
In one long, bitter, desperate strife,
'Gainst hydra-headed, rampant wrong,
When one is fain of dance and song—
To smell the rose, and hear the fair
Soft wings of Pleasure in the air.

Yet would we choose the weary way,
The fighting, not the feasting day—
To wear the armour, not the flowers,
To sing of Truth while voice is ours ;
Because good fight's worst wounds are far
More dear than any pleasures are.

THE NEW FLOWER.

WHY not give up the strife—fold hands and wait
(Unmurmuring and unsubdued) our Fate,—
Throw down the flower of hope, and let it lie ;
While we, with empty hands and heart, go by
To where despair's rank weeds grow thick and strong
Albeit we have cut and trampled them so long ?

Why not? Ah, try, and see what bloom will bear
Your cultivated seedling of despair ;
What flower of rest, whose fragrance will repay
For that sweet, hurtful flower you threw away ;—
It blossoms—Ah! 'tis hope that blooms again
More beautiful, more chei shed, and more vain !

ALL IN ALL.

WHEN all the night is horrible with clamour
 Of voiceless curses darker than the night,
When light of sun there is not, neither starshine,
 Nor any beacon on the hill of Right,
Shine, O thou Light of Life, upon our pathway—
 Freedom, be thou our light !

Since all life's ways are difficult and dreary,
 And false steps echo thro' eternity,
And there is nought to lean on as we journey
 By paths not smooth as downward paths would be,
We have no other help—we need no other ;
 Freedom, we lean on thee !

The slave's base murmur and the threats of tyrants,
 The voice of cowards who cringe and cry 'Retreat,'
The whisper of the world, 'Come where power calls
 thee !'
The whisper of the flesh, 'Let life be sweet.'

Silence all these with thy divine commanding ;
Guide thou thy children's feet !

For thee, for thee we bear the cross, the banner,
For thee are all our battles fought and won ;
For thee was every prayer we ever uttered,
For thee has every deed of ours been done ;
To thee we press—to thee, triumphant splendour.
O Freedom, lead us on !

Where thou shalt lead we do not fear to follow.
Thou hast our hearts ; we follow them in thee.
Spirit of Light, whatever thou shalt show us,
Strong in the faith, we shall not fear to see ;
We reach to thee through all the waves of darkness
Of all the days to be.

A WORD FOR THE FUTURE.

WHEN we sow the good seed of the present,
That the future will garner and gain,
For whom do we till, weed, and water,
For whom watch the sun and the rain,
With passionate faith that our waiting
And labour will not be in vain?

Not the men and the women about us—
Themselves but themselves can make free ;
Not they, more than we, the full harvest
Of the seed we are sowing will see ;
But the fruits will be reaped by the children—
The men and the women to be.

O, the children !—the rose-leaf soft faces,
The sweet little voices, and mild,

The arms that have clung and caressed us,
The lips that have babbled and smiled,—
Have these blinded us so we discern not
That a child is not only a child?

Not only a toy and a treasure
For mother's and father's delight,
Not only a flower want may wither,
Or lovelessness ruin and blight,
But a soul to be saved, in Truth's sunshine,
Or lost where Truth's absence makes night.

And the souls that shall shape the world's future
Are the souls we are shaping to-day !
Let the children have share in our justice,
Not just in our pity and play.
They will do the world's work, and our work is
To show them the work and the way.

And he who is helping the children,
Who are frail as the buds of a rose,
Who is keeping the canker from blighting
The blossoms before they unclose,
And making the future sons hardy
To face all the future's fell foes,—

He is doing the world's work eternal
That the first dawn of soul saw begun ;
He is hastening the hour when the children
The battles we lost will have won :
When the deeds that we did not, and could not,
Those small hands—grown strong—will have done.

KNOWLEDGE.

I.

I SAW a people trampled on, oppressed,
With helpless hands, and eyes of light afraid,
With aching shoulders whereon burdens laid
By day and night choked hope and murdered rest ;
A people sordid, sad, unloved, unblessed,
Whose shroud by their own hands was ever made,
Whose never-ending toil was only paid
By death-in-life—or death, of life's gifts best.

‘What help,’ I cried, ‘for these whose hands are weak—
Too weak to hold the weapons they should wield ;
Too weak to grasp a helping hand, or seek
With armed battalions to dispute the field,
And on the oppressors just revenge to wreak ?
Then—as I cried—the helper was revealed.

II.

I saw a woman, pure, and calm, and grand,
With strong broad brows, and eyes whose keen clear
flame
Lit up men's hearts and showed them glory and shame,
And what things could, and what things could not stand,
Justice and Honour stood at her right hand ;
And blazoned on her forehead was her name,
Too bright for me to read ; and as she came
Men bowed and worshipped her through all the land.

And evil could not live before her eyes,
And good rose up to answer to her call.
'Who art thou,' then I said, 'that dost arise
Strong to redeem this people from their thrall ?'
She answered me with tender voice and wise :
'My name is Knowledge—and I conquer all !'

TO DIANA.

As the moon that coldly shines though her worshippers
die as they kneel,
And feels but her coldness and brightness, and knows
not the death that they deal,
As the sun that shines and knows not that men are
parched by his heat,
As the world that whirls with its millions of hearts that
bleed as they beat,
So you shine, O my sun without shadow, my moon with-
out stain or spot,
And carry men's wrecked hearts with you, my world, and
know it not !

AN APPEAL.

DEAR, do not die !

Of cypresses and grassy graves sing I !
I hang with wreaths of song death's grief-grown cross,
And weep to music for life's infinite loss,
And make the sweetest song of sharpest woe ;
I know the way, because I love you so.
If you died, what more could be sung or said ?
I could not sing of death if you were dead.

Dear, do not love !

Do not love me ! Keep still aloof, above !
While you and love in far-off glory stand,
Clear sounds the voice, and harp responds to hand.
But, if you loved me—if you came quite near,
And set love 'mid life's common things and dear,
Mute would the song be—love would be too fair
To waste upon the wide world's empty air
And, songless, I should droop and vainly pine—
I could not sing of love if you were mine.

THE BALLAD OF SPLENDID SILENCE.

IN MEMORIAM FERENCZ RENYI.

HUNGARY, 1848.

THIS is the story of Renyi,
And when you have heard it through,
Pray God He send no trial like his
To try the faith of you.

And if his doom be upon you,
Then may God grant you this :
To fight as good a fight as he,
And win a crown like his !

He was strong and handsome and happy,
Beloved and loving and young,
With eyes that men set their trust in,
And the fire of his soul on his tongue.

He loved the Spirit of Freedom,
 He hated his country's wrongs,
He told the patriots' stories,
 And he sang the patriots' songs.

With mother and sister and sweetheart
 His safe glad days went by,
Till Hungary called on her children
 To arm, to fight, and to die.

'Good-bye to mother and sister ;
 Good-bye to my sweet sweetheart ;
I fight for you—you pray for me,
 We shall not be apart !'

The women prayed at the sunrise,
 They prayed when the skies grew dim ;
His mother and sister prayed for the Cause,
 His sweetheart prayed for him.

For mother and sister and sweetheart,
 But most for the true and the right,
He low laid down his own life's hopes
 And led his men to fight.

Skirmishing, scouting, and spying,
Night-watch, attack, and defeat ;
The resolute, desperate fighting,
The hopeless, reluctant retreat ;

Ruin, defeat, and disaster,
Capture and loss and despair,
And half of his regiment hidden,
And only this man knew where !

Prisoner, fast bound, sore wounded,
They brought him roughly along,
With his body as weak and broken
As his spirit was steadfast and strong.

Before the Austrian general—
'Where are your men ?' he heard ;
He looked black death in its ugly face
And answered never a word.

'Where is your regiment hidden ?
Speak—you are pardoned straight.
No? We can find dumb dogs their tongues,
You rebel reprobate !'

They dragged his mother and sister
Into the open hall.

‘ Give up your men, if these women
Are dear to your heart at all ! ’

He turned his eyes on his sister,
And spoke to her silently ;
She answered his silence with speaking,
And straight from the heart spoke she :

‘ If you betray your country,
You spit on our father’s name ;
And what is life without honour ?
And what is death without shame ? ’

He looked on the mother who bore him,
And her smile was splendid to see ;
He hid his face with a bitter cry,
But never a word said he.

‘ Son of my body—be silent !
My days at the best are few,
And I shall know how to give them,
Son of my heart, for you ! ’

He shivered, set teeth, kept silence :
With never a plaint or cry
The women were slain before him,
And he stood and he saw them die.

Then they brought his lovely beloved,
Desire of his heart and eyes.
'Say where your men are hidden,
Or say that your sweetheart dies.'

She threw her arms about him,
She laid her lips to his cheek :
'Speak ! for my sake who love you !
Love, for our love's sake, speak !'

His eyes are burning and shining
With the fire of immortal disgrace—
Christ ! walk with him in the furnace
And strengthen his soul for a space !

Long he looked at his sweetheart
His eyes grew tender and wet ;
Closely he held her to him,
His lips to her lips were set.

'See ! I am young ! I love you !
I am not ready to die !
One word makes us happy for ever,
Together, you and I.'

Her arms round his neck were clinging,
Her lips his cold lips caressed ;
He suddenly flung her from him,
And folded his arms on his breast.

She wept, she shrieked, she struggled,
She cursed him in God's name,
For the woe of her early dying,
And for her dying's shame.

And still he stood, and his silence
Like fire was burning him through,
Then the muskets spoke once, and were silent,
And she was silent too.

They turned to torture him further,
If further might be—in vain ;
He had held his peace in that threefold hell,
And he never spoke again :

The end of the uttermost anguish
The soul of the man could bear,
Was the madhouse where tyrants bury
The broken shells of despair.

By the heaven renounced in her service,
By the hell thrice braved for her sake,
By the years of madness and silence,
By the heart that her enemies brake ;

By the young life's promise ruined,
By the years of too living death,
By the passionate self-devotion,
And the absolute perfect faith ;

By the thousands who know such anguish,
And share such divine renown,
Who have borne them bravely in battle,
And won the conqueror's crown ;

By the torments her children have suffered,
By the blood that her martyrs will give,
By the deaths men have died at her altars,
By these shall our Liberty live !

In the silence of tears, in the burden
Of the wrongs we some day will repay,
Live the brothers who died in all ages
For the Freedom we live for to-day !

TO A CHILD READING.

YES, read the pages of the old-world story,
Of kings of noble deed and noble thought,
Of heroes whose resplendent crown of glory
Bound their wide brows, unsought.

But be not sad because their work is ended,
And they have rest which life so long denied :
They still live in the world which they befriended,
For which they lived and died.

Great deeds can never die : all through the ages
Their fruits increasing ever grow and spread,
And many a deed unnamed in written pages
Lived once—and is not dead.

And, God be praised, man's work is not completed,
There still is work on earth for men to do ;
Not yet, not yet are all the false defeated,
Not yet crownèd all the true.

Still the world needs brave deeds and true hearts
many,
Not yet are all the noble battles won !
We too, my child, may do deeds great as any
That ever yet were done.

‘WHATEVER THY HAND FINDETH . . .’

RED, red the sunset flames behind
The black, black elms and hedges,
All through the noon no least leaf stirred,
But crickets hummed and beetles whirred—
Now comes a breath of fresh, sweet wind
From silent pools and sedges.

All through hot noon the reapers stand
And toil, with jests and laughter,
Beneath the blazing skies that burn.
Then, laughing still, they homeward turn
By threes and fours ; and hand in hand
Go two that linger after.

And here we linger hand in hand,
And watch the blackening shadows.
Had we been born to reap and sow,
To wake when swallows stir, and go
Forth in chill dawn to plough the land,
Or mow the misty meadows,

Had that been nobler? Love of mine,
We still had only striven,
As now we strive, to do our best,
To do good work and earn good rest,—
All work that's human is divine,
All life, lived well, makes heaven!

THE LILY AND THE CROSS.

GIRDLED with elms, wherein the loud rooks build,
With dreamy hush of its remoteness filled,
Where every sound that breaks the slumb'rous air
Accentuates the peace that lingers there,
One of God's restful grave-set gardens lies,
Where His flowers sleep till He shall bid them rise.

The broken hearts that here have laid in faith
Their dearest dead, themselves have trysted Death,
Have gone themselves out of the light of day,
From scent of rose and fragrance of the may,
And in the spot left lonely for their sakes,
Have made that quietness life never makes.

But one new grave is there. And he who laid
Under its turf a dear and lovely maid,
Planted, before his bitterest tears were shed,
A lily over the belovèd head :

And ere the lily bloomed he lay beside
That Lily lost who should have been his bride.

The lily that he planted lived and throve
Over the grave of buried human love.
All through the winter's cruel hours and cold,
She lay safe curled beneath the sheltering mould,
Yet ever longed for winter to be done,
That she might break to bud and see the sun.

Long was the winter, and the tardy spring
She dreamed of so seemed to be tarrying
In the far world of the eternal flowers,
Reluctant to revive this world of ours,
Where flowers must die, and spring herself must fade,
That summer's perfect tribute may be paid.

The birds who built high in the belfry tower,
Had heard the lily sigh for summer's hour,
And at the first low tremulous breath of spring,
A bird flew downwards to her, twittering,
'O Lily ! Spring is coming ; bud and break
Into your loveliest blossom, for her sake.'

Shivering with joy, the waiting lily heard
That long-desired, all but despaired-of word.
She pushed aside the sheltering mould, and thrust
Her sharp leaves upwards through earth's yielding
crust,
Did everything a lily could have done
To taste the hour when she should see the sun.

Then over all the earth was felt the dear
And gracious life of the re-risen year ;
And vows of love were whispered where the wet
Dead leaves lay thick about the violet.
And all the meadow, and the orchards gray,
Grew greener and more glorious every day.

The lily grew ; at last her drooping head
Hung over her forsaken winter bed ;
The sky was blue, the elms were green and fair,
And passionate life pulsated everywhere ;
'The sun, the sun,' she cried, 'for whom I grow !
O, I shall die with longing for it so !'

She could not see the sun ! Upon her head
No golden heat and radiance were shed,

A shadow from the cross by which she grew
Fell on her and denied it to her view.
'What good at all is life,' she cried, 'to me,
If I the sun I love may never see ?'

But the birds whispered, 'Lily, be at rest !
The Master of the garden knoweth best ;
He gave the longing, and He is too good
To cheat the hope He planted in your blood ;
Trust Him and wait—He will not mock desire
Which He Himself did in your soul inspire.'

The lily drooped and sorrowed—yet resigned
Lived in the cross's shadow, nor repined.
She knew the sun would some day shine for her,
And all her leaves to fuller being stir.
And if it never smiled on her ? 'Instead
The Master of the garden will,' she said.

The days passed on, and every day the sun
Through higher heaven arose his course to run.
The lily woke from sleep on Easter day,
And her eyes opened to a tender ray
Shed through green leaves into the waiting cup
Which she so long had patiently held up.

And as completion seemed her life to crown,
All she had always longed for now her own—
She saw the Master of the garden pass
Among His flowers, among the graves and grass,
And at His voice she felt a stronger bliss
Than had thrilled through her at the sun's first kiss.

' My lily now is strong enough to bear
The sunlight for which all her longings were.
The shadow of the cross was best before,
Which now, grown strong, she needs not any more.
Gaze on the sun, the shadow time is past,
My patient lily, and be glad at last ! '

DE PROFUNDIS.

Tired with my work, and very tired indeed
Of all these things men seek, and do not need,
Not base to strive their way, and far too weak
To strive for what man needs and will not seek ;
Tired of the clamorous world, the strife and smart,
And, most of all, tired of this beating heart !

Ah ! if to-night my worn-out soul might glide
Outward, a quietly-retreating tide,
Lose conscious misery, and be at last
One with the mystic sea, divine and vast—
And if the dawning of that hour supreme
Were lighted by your eyes, my soul's one dream !

All the persistent desolate refrain,
That moans forever in my throbbing brain,

Of ruined peace and blighted hopes, would be
Only a lovely lullaby to me,
If but my head with all its aches might rest
For one breath's space upon your breathing breast.

But even for that sleep, how could I bear
To lose this memory, that has fed despair
And starved my life of joy, yet has been all
Whereof my life could make a festival?
Yet I might even bear to let it go
If you could lift it from my lips and *know*.

You shall not know, you never yet have known !
I choose to die, as I have lived—alone.
The savage surges, swelling in my ears,
Will drown your voice, remembered all these years,
Will drown my memories, and the heart pain-tossed
That would have broken, knowing its memories lost !

THE MERMAID.

‘IF on some balmy summer night
You rowed across the moon-path white,
And saw the shining sea grow fair
With silver scales and golden hair,
What would you do ?’

‘I would be wise,
And shut my ears and shut my eyes
Lest I should leap into the tide
To clasp the sea-maid as I died !’

‘But if she charmed you till you gazed
Deep in the sea-green eyes she raised,
Would you not lift her to the boat,
Let the oars drift, and moonwards float ?’
‘No, that could never, never be !
For sea-maids die who leave the sea,
And no sweet maiden knows a charm
Could make me work her any harm !’

'But if you thus were strong to flee
From sweet spells woven of moon and sea,
Are you quite sure that you would reach,
Without one backward look, the beach ?'
'I might look back, my dear, and then
Row back into the snare again:
Or, if I safely got away,
Regret it to my dying day !'

THE PIXIES' GARDEN.

SLEEPLESS I lay, though softly rocked
Upon the bosom of the night ;
The steadfast stars looked down and mocked
My waking dreams of dead delight,
They everlastingly as bright
As when her hand in mine was locked.

The moon swept out through deeps of sky,
Dim trailing clouds she left behind ;
'Come out,' she said, 'all clouds pass by ;
Thou for thy soul shalt solace find.
These fevers of a tortured mind
My light will soothe—or sanctify.'

I rose and passed where hawthorns grow
Beside the path where, glad and gay,

I and my sweetheart used to go
By meadows wreathed with new-mown hay ;
Through fields by moonlit dew made gray,
I and my heart went, sad and slow.

I reached the garden where the hops
Make fairy garlands everywhere,
From each tall pole a dream-wreath drops,
And strong keen scent fills all the air.
I saw the pixies dancing there
Their magic dance that never stops.

Around the poles in circling rings
From dawn of moon till dawn of day,
With dewy cobwebs for their wings,
They glide and gleam and swing and sway,
And mortal lips may never say
The song that every pixy sings.

And rainbows day has never seen
With unnamed colours make them fair.
Their feet are shod with Spring's first green,
Green gems of glow-worms deck their hair
That floats upon the moonlit air,
Like golden webs on silver sheen.

Their dance goes on through all the years,
But those who see it, few they be.
Only by eyes which many tears
And vigils have made clear to see
Are they behoden : and wishes three
Are his to whom that dance appears.

My first wish? Ah! what room for doubt?
The wish that eats me night and day:
'Would she were here!' No thought about
The other wishes came my way;
For round my neck her dear arms lay,
And all the world was well shut out.

How glad each was of each, and how
Life blossomed then, one heart records ;
I shall remember that, I know,
When life is withered up past words,
And, shrunken, slips through earth's loose cords :
I shall remember then as now.

Lost dream, too perfect not to break!
Yet here I might have held her now,

And so for ever—but she spake
(O my soul's voice, divinely low !)
'Ah, might we but our future know ?'
And I wished with her, for Love's sake.

And lo ! a sea of blackness broke
About us, and we knew our fate.
Close, close we clung, and neither spoke,
So widely, wildly desolate
The destiny we could not wait
For time to seal or to revoke.

Yet to my heart hers beat, although
It beat in fear and not in bliss.
O fool, to court a deeper woe—
Together we had conquered this :
No woe could live beneath the kiss
That joined our souls an hour ago.

'Would that we two were dead !' I cried,
'And in the quiet churchyard laid ;
We should sleep sweetly side by side,
Of past and future unafraid,
By never a hope or fear dismayed,
Together, still, and satisfied.'

And as I wished it, she was gone !
For that one gift no pixies give.
I only woke, and woke alone,
As I henceforth must wake and live,
Must serve and suffer, strain and strive,—
And in my eyes the sunlight shone.

/

RONDEAU.

LONG ago, when youth was gay,
We two dreamed our lives should grow
Like two flowers in one sweet May—
And we told each other so.
You are gone : Time's fingers gray
Blind my eyes with showerèd snow :
Hope and youth look far away—
Long ago.

Yet the summer winds, I know,
Will blow soft, one perfect day,
Melt the snows and roses strow :
‘ Ah, what cold winds used to blow
When I was alone,’ you’ll say—
‘ Long ago ! ’

TOO LATE.

LATE—too late—my bird is dead :
Vain is all that can be said—
All my tears are more than vain
To bring back his life again.

Here he lies upon the snow,
Little bird that loved life so—
Never more to wake and sing
In the budding days of spring.

Never more, when winds of morn
Stir the green and dewy corn,
And awake the dreaming leaves,
Will he twitter 'neath the eaves.

I shall never hear him make
Music more for love's sweet sake—
Singing to his wee brown mate
In the pear-tree by the gate.

I will lay him in the earth,
Where all shapes of life have birth ;
Whence the flowers will grow and bring
Joy to other birds in spring.

I will lay him down to sleep,
Where the summer wind may heap
Drifted rose-leaves white and red
Over his green-curtained bed.

CHRISTMAS ROSES.

WHEN all the skies with snow were gray,
And all the earth with snow was white,
I wandered down a still wood way,
And there I met my heart's delight
Slow moving through the silent wood,
The spirit of its solitude :
The brown birds and the lichenèd tree
Seemed less a part of it than she.

Where pheasants' feet and rabbits' feet
Had marked the snow with traces small,
I saw the foot-prints of my sweet—
The sweetest woodland thing of all.
With Christmas roses in her hand,
One heart-beat's space I saw her stand,
And then I let her pass, and stood
Lone in an empty world of wood !

And, though by that same path I've passed
Down that same woodland every day,
That meeting was the first and last,
And she is hopelessly away.
I wonder was she really there—
Her hands, and eyes, and lips, and hair ?
Or was it but my dreaming sent
Her image down the way I went ?

Empty the woods are, where we met—
They will be empty in the spring ;
The cowslip and the violet
Will die without her gathering.
But I dare dream one radiant day
Red rose-wreathed she will pass this way
Across the glad and honoured grass,
And then—I will not let her pass !

SUMMER.

It's pleasant to rest on a stile at noon
When the meadow's aflower and the month
is June,

And to take your ease on a summer day
When nobody's likely to pass that way.

And it's pleasant to whistle and walk a mile
For the sake of passing a certain stile,
When it isn't likely that one would care
If somebody chanced to be resting there.

GOOD ADVICE.

BE watchful guardian of those eyes of yours,
Those lights that lead the hearts of men your way :
Nor use them like the marsh-light that allures
All passers-by, and lures them all astray.
Indeed, 'twere better if on me alone
The light of those enchanting lamps were thrown.

For pity's sake laugh seldom—and be slow
To smile that sudden smile that thrills one through ;
For when you smile, those four sweet dimples show,
And no one knows the mischief dimples do.
Or, if you must smile, smile on me. I fear
No danger from your daintiest dimples, dear.

Speak little. There is something in your voice
Which seems to send the English language mad.
And when you say 'Be sad !' men hear 'Rejoice !'
And when you say 'Despair !' they hear 'Be glad !'
I know your harshest word must music be
To any man in Europe except me.

And never let a hand that holds a rose
Droop close to lips of man as this to mine.
It is the breath of roses, I suppose,
That stirs the blood of most of us like wine :
And most men would have kissed your hand to-day
Before you snatched it and its rose away.

And if your hand is threatened with a kiss,
Don't frown and blush and smile, if you are wise ;
For if you do, a hand may come—like this—
And turn your face round to your lover's eyes.
And then, and then—for anything I know,
It's possible that he may kiss you—so !

BETROTHAL SONG.

As he who the dead night through unhappy watches and
wakes,

And is glad of the pallid surf where the first wave of
morning breaks,

As he long pent in a dungeon is glad of the first free
breath,

As he who is tortured with living is glad of the promise
of death,

As he who is weary to sickness is glad of the ceasing of
strife,

I am glad of the thought of your presence, of your feet in
the ways of my life !

As autumn weeps for the summer, and night grieves after
the day,

As age reaches arms back to youth, and December thrusts
hands out to May,

As all that is sad and unloved desires all that is happy
and dear,

As all that is stormy and dark loves all that is quiet and
clear,

As despair yearns back for a life burnt out at an idol's
feet,

My heart yearns passionate after, whenever you leave me,
sweet !

As the world, with its broken lives, hopes ever, for ever
longs

For a new bright life that shall lighten its darkness and
right its wrongs,

As the starlight dreams of the moon, as the moonlight
dreams of the sun,

So I dream of the day that is coming, when I and my
heart shall be one :

When you who are one with my heart, with all of its
pleasure and pain,

Shall be one with my life for ever, and never leave me
again !

IN PRAISE OF WORK.

WHIT-MONDAY.

GOOD-MORNING, dear ! How the world is gay !
Kind sun, to shine on our holiday !
We'll wander away, my girl, my queen,
To where the meadows are fresh and green,
And where the bluebells and wind-flowers grow,
And forget the city that hurts us so.

We work all our dull lives long, my dear,
With just four breathing days in the year,
Four whole fair days in which we may do
Whatever we care to, I and you,
May laugh and be merry, and see the sun.
Four days in the year—and this is one.

Through all the other desolate days
We labour sadly, each in our place,

And Sunday's a doleful holy day,
When we mustn't laugh, nor the children play ;
It's a breathing-place where the poor may gain
Strength to go on with their work again.

Work, work, still work ! It's always the cry,
Work if you'd live, and work till you die ;
Work for your masters, they who sit
And idly taste the sweet fruits of it ;
Work when they bid you—and thank them, too,
If they'll only give you the work to do.

I don't mind work—but it's hard to bear,
To know that my darling sits stitching there,
With her white white face and her thin thin hand,
Just to keep a dainty and idle band,
Who would draw aside their silks and fur
For fear they should brush against one like her.

There *is* none like her—gentle and wise,
With her patient mouth and her earnest eyes.
O, my little one, is it love or Fate
That gives us poor the rich to hate,

And gives to the rich the poor as prey ?
What a question to ask on a holiday !

So—no more questions—just let us sit
And watch the sun and the gold of it
As it touches the trees and the greener grass ;
Let us hear the laughing children pass,
And the song of the birds and the unsaid word
That in the city is never heard.

Let me hold your hand, and try to forget
That my heart is sore, and your eyes are wet.
O, my girl, my girl, there will never be
A home together for you and me,
With little voices and little feet. . . .
You have not much longer to work, my sweet.

Yes—the work's soon over! To sew all day
And half the night is the common way.
Some live on, withered, and some, alas!
Die like the daisies we pull from the grass.
It is work that is killing our sweethearts and wives,
And the joy and hope of our broken lives!

So hurrah for work, and our masters dear,
Who give us four days in the whole long year—
Four days for hope and for love and for rest,
And the rest for work, the glorious and blest ! . . .
God—hold our hand on the reckoning-day,
Lest all we owe them we should repay!

ON AN AUTUMN DAY.

No man liveth to himself.

IN the mellow hush of the autumn days,
When summer is hardly dead,
When the corn is reaped and the hops are picked,
And the woods catching fire glow red,
It is sweet to dream thro' a lazy noon,
With the great sky over my head.

With your hand in mine it is sweet to lie
On this close-cropped meadow grass,
To watch the rooks go sailing by,
And count the sheep as they pass ;
To dream of our youth and the vanished days
That will come not again, alas !

O, the dear dead days of the long ago,
When we and the world were young,

Before I guessed how the skies could frown,
And the heart of a man be wrung ;
When we walked, not wondering, over the flowers
That Fate in our pathway flung.

When I dreamed that the world would be always bright,
The skies would be always blue,
That I should be always strong in the right,
And my sweetheart be always true ;
And that man's best work was to build a nest—
The softest of nests—for two.

When I thought that the hearts of all men were pure,
And the hearts of all women brave ;
When I thought that all I dreamed I could do,
And all I desired could have.
O sea of time, you have wrecked those dreams,
Yet something you let me save !

For though life is rough and one's dear dreams die,
One learns by torture and tears
What things are worthy a true man's hopes,
And what is worth true men's fears.
And one holds some faiths to the last, thank God,
Through the wildest surge of the years.

O the beautiful earth, O the pastures smooth,
The meadows quiet and fair,
The heaven of stillness and solitude
In the sun-warmed autumn air ;
O, the ache of our hearts as we think of the town
And the hearts that are aching there !

For this we have learned, that no true hearts dare
To live for themselves alone,
Alone be glad of the woods and fields,
Since no man's life is his own ;
Not his own but all men's, that right may reign
And wrong may be overthrown.

Sweet dream of my youth that never has changed,
Dear sweetheart, helper and wife,
Shall the woman I worship, the man you love,
Bear the shame of a peaceful life ?
No ! We fight till the Kingdom of God be come,
Or we break our heart in the strife !

THE MEADOWS OF LONG AGO.

OH the sweet wide meadows, the elm-trees tall,
The lilac that grew by the southern wall,
The orchards white, and the gardens neat,
The may, the cowslips, the meadow-sweet,
The pale dog-roses in every hedge,
The narrow path, by the coppice edge,
The path we shall walk by, you and I,
When the white moon rises, by-and-by—
The path we shall walk by? No, ah no !
It leads through the meadows of long ago.

Our meadows ! They've built a chapel there,
And a row of villas, yellow and bare ;
And down the path where we used to go,
Stand squalid cottages, all in a row—
And the elms are gone—and our wood's green maze—
Where do the lovers walk now-a-days ?

Not through our meadows ; the sordid years
Have built upon them—and all our tears
Will never teach the dead grass to grow
On the trampled meadows of long ago !

A REASON.

WHY should we toil when, after all,
A few short years are all we have
Wherein to make good things befall,
And such soul as we have to save?
So little time is ours wherein
Work may be done, and then we must,
The good and ill, be crumbled in,
A little handful of death's dust.

Why do we seek to sow a seed
Whose harvest we shall never reap;
To say a word or do a deed
Whereof we shall no memory keep
When life is gone and death is here,
And good and ill report are one,
And the benign and joyless year
Alike for us are lived and done?

What does it matter what we do?
What does it matter what we say?
Why should we care for false or true
Who only live one doubtful day,
Why? If this life be all we have,
At least we grudge not all to spend—
The best wish we had, that best we gave—
And fight the battle to the end.

The future and the past of man
Each day call out for each man's best,
And he must bear his own soul's ban
Who locks his best within his breast.
If this is all that shall be ours,
At least therein be something won,
Lest the world weep our barren hours
Wherein no noble deed was done.

THE MESSAGE OF THE DOVE.

GOD help us all where'er we be,

God knows we need it sore!

God help the men at sea to-night,

God help the wives on shore

For O it is an easier thing

To sail the ocean wide,

Than to sit and see hope grow despair

By a desolate fireside.

Last night the angry sun dropped down

Like a ball of fire in the sea,

And the sullen water heaved and moaned

'Neath the weight of the storm to be.

And just one white sail flecked the sea

At the outer edge of the world,

And the level waste of the sand gleamed smooth

Where small waves played and curled.

And, before the after-light was gone,

The wind began to roar.

God help the men at sea to-night,

God help the wives on shore!

The sun had set but a breathing-space

When the wind began to wail,

And over the waste of the leaden waves

Shone foam lines thin and pale.

The fainting west was streaked across

With black and cloudy bars,

The angry sunset bore a night

Without or moon or stars.

No moon nor stars, but a mad mad wind,

That flung the foam-flakes wide,

And lashed the sea till it smote with rage

Against the good ship's side.

No stars nor moon, but a strange wild light,

That was not moon nor star,

That lit the crests of the curling surf

That writhes where the rock reefs are.

High rose the waves—with a bitter laugh
Each wave drew up its head,
And tumbled shoreward with a groan,
A laugh and a groan for the dead.

Black, black grew the night, and the gleaming spray
Hissed over the pebbly shore,
The wind caught it up in his evil grasp
To fling at the cottage door.

Warm-curtained the window, and on the wall
The lamplight and firelight play ;
The cottage would be a pleasant place
If he were not away.

The wife cowered down in the firelight glow,
Her head upon her knee :
'O Christ, have pity on us to-night,
And bring back my man to me !'

The wind went shrieking about the house,
And fain would an entrance win,
But door and window were barred and fast,
And would not let it in.

There came a hush while the storm took breath,
And down came the driving rain :
' I wish it beat on my new-made grave,
For he will not come back again ! '

But louder, louder thundered the waves,
The spray lashed window and door ;
' And what will my life be worth to me
If he should come home no more ? '

The wind went roaring across the foam
With its message of doom to be ;
Ah, what will the wind do out in the night
Betwixt the wide sky and sea ?

A rush—a blast—for the wind has won,
It has thrust the shutter aside,
The lamp leaps up—and dies on a flash,
And the ashes are scattered wide.

And the wife sits on by the bare hearthstone
And the wind is lord of the place ;
It lays its hands on her loosened hair,
And smites on her pallid face.

The night was black upon sea and land,
The night in her heart was black :
' I wish the earth was over my head,
For he will never come back ! '

Hark ! In through the window a rush of wings ;
Had an angel been sent to save ?
Would her soul go up from the wind-swept home,
And his from the wind-swept wave ?

' Nay, I will not die till I know him dead,
For O if he should come,
Would I leave for him what I cannot face,
The sight of an empty home !

The wings still fluttered and nearer came,
Till a soft plume her cheek caressed,
She put up her hands—'twas a stray soft bird
She caught and held to her breast.

A stray lost pigeon, wearied with flight
In the stress of the stormy air,
The tempest had blown to her human heart,
And found it a shelter there.

The bird found shelter, and lighted peace

In the heart where it rested thus :

' If God will care for a bird like this,

I trust Him—He cares for us! '

She closed the window and lit the lamp,

And she held the white dove fast,

That had been through the storm as her heart had done,

And anchored in peace at last.

And she knelt and prayed—' Thou wilt hear me now,

O Mighty on sea and shore,

As the wings of Thy dove guide the boat's white wings,

And bring him safe home once more.'

And the storm raved on—when at last it slept,

Worn out with the night of doom,

Sleep had come after the night of tears

In the little cottage room.

And the wind, grown kind, blew out of the sky

The clouds it had gathered there,

And the sun rose up on a blue blue sea,

And a heaven of clear sweet air.

And the sun is mirrored in two brown eyes,
Where tears are still glittering—
And a woman who stands by her cottage door
To see what the day will bring.

And his ship is there, and the sun, and joy,
And good-bye to the night and pain,
For Fate and Love are for once agreed
And the boat is safe home again.

And what had guided the white warm bird,
And what led the ship aright?
Ask not of the birds that were lost in the storm
And the ships that went down that night;

But ask of the woman whose love was saved,
Or the bird whose tired wings found rest,
And they will answer—God rules the storm,
And all that He does is best.

LOVE'S ECONOMY.

LOVE filled my cup with tears and wine ;
I drank the mingled draught divine—
Glad to the soul that it was mine.

Love crowned my head with thorn and rose ;
Such wreaths of rose no thorns disclose ;
Only the happy wearer knows.

Love gave me ashes, gave me bread,
Fed on the soul that on it fed,
And kissed my heart until it bled.

Love gave me sunlight, gave me rain,
Love taught me pleasure, brought me pain,
And scourged my soul with loss and gain.

Yet did the gain so far outweigh
The infinite loss, that till to-day
I never wished my pain away.

Because I thought that you, at least,
Wore only roses at our feast,
And heard a song that never ceased.

But now I know that you, as I,
Hear knells in all our revelry,
And, not for passion only, sigh ; .

That you, too, bear a heavy cross,
And sway 'twixt sense of gain and loss,
And, rent by tempests, turn and toss.

I know not whether, for your sake,
I would not choose this chain to break,
And—dream-bereft—meet life awake.

And you—what would you choose? Who knows?
Since each one to the other shows
Only the wine—the smile—the rose.

THE LOVER TO HIS LASS.

WREATHED with delight the world is bright,
A million buds are springing,
And June her dower of lavish flower
And scented air is bringing.;
And all the way is white with may,
The pale dog-rose is blowing,
And sweeter far, my dear, you are
Than any bud that's blowing.

The birds are gay this first June day,
And all the world is ringing,
With lovely notes from throstle's throats,
And linnet's tender singing.
Of love sing they along the way
Where you and I are going,
Love—the one theme of summer's dream,
The one sweet truth worth knowing !

What matter, dear, if vain and drear
Men say a world like this is?
What can they know, who call it so,
Of summer, songs, and kisses?
Life's sharpest thorn may well be borne
In youth's blue breezy weather;
We'll not complain of any pain
That finds us still together.

Together now, when roses blow,
And youth blooms like the roses;
Together too, we one, we two
When life's dear story closes.
And one at last, when we have passed
Pains, pleasure, prayers, and praises,
And you and I together lie
Beneath the churchyard daisies.

IN A NINETEENTH-CENTURY EDEN.

JUST for this once, this once I will be wise !

No blossom here shall turn to fruit for me.

This sweet half-certainty that is not doubt,

This sadness that joy's mists are wreathed about,

These long looks, lengthened out in dreams again,

I would keep these, renouncing other gain.

I pluck and wear my flower of Paradise ;

I will not have the apple it might be !

For flowers mean perfume, promise of delight

More dear than fruit has ever granted yet :

And fruit is much too sweet, and much too sour,

And, with the first bite, one regrets the flower.

The flower will die—but your clear eyes shall weep

A gathered flower, whose fragrance time shall keep,

And its white memory shall light my night

—Dark with the thousand things one would forget.

For—since we have not talked of love, but gazed
The one sweet second more than others do,
Touched hands, and known the electric flash that flies
From each to each, through meeting hands and eyes,
Have dreamed and doubted, questioned and replied,
And laughed not gaily, and not sadly sighed—
All we might be and are not,—heavens untried—
In each for each eternally abide.
I am to you what no man else can be,
You, what no woman ever was to me,
A splendid light, a life's ideal raised
Above the dust mere loves degrade one to.

Yet, how refuse, when lips like yours invite ?
When eyes like yours look sad, how turn away ?
I cannot tell you why my lips are fain
From this sweet offered apple to refrain,
For, at the word, our blossom shed would be
And the mere fruit be left for you and me :
The only word could save, would ruin all !
So—the old tale ! The bloom will slowly fall,
The fruit grows ripe—I, spite of will and wit,
Must bite the apple if you offer it ;

Then will the dream-lights flicker out and die,
And we shall wail, awakened, you and I,
That I to you am nothing any more
Than what some other fool has been before,
And you to me no more my sweet Dream-queen,
But what some fifty other fools have been.
I cannot save you, Eve! Your apple bite!
And—ere your teeth have met—our world grows gray.

DIVORCED.

I.

His was a hard and common lot,
Which thousands bear as well ;
He bore it meekly—his was not
The nature to rebel.

We never saw him sad—but then
We never saw him gay—
He never talked to the other men
He spoke to every day.

He seemed a commonplace, who tried
A good machine to be ;
The columns of a railway guide
Were not more dull than he.

The dreary round of office life
Where city clerks must move
He trod—uncheered by child or wife,
Unsanctified by love.

And when he died, strange hands laid bare
His dull life's secret spring :
A rose, a lock of baby-hair,
And half a broken ring.

II.

A beauty radiant as the sun,
And baleful as the moon,
A woman for whom youth was done
Too utterly, too soon !

A brilliant brain that, strong and keen,
Pierced lies with mocking thrust—
A heroine that might have been—
A jewel in the dust.

She never sighed—but then men say
They never knew her glad ;
She was too gifted to be gay,
Too weary to be sad.

She often laughed—a laugh, we knew,
To which joy lent no breath,
She laughed at all things sad and true
—At children, love, and death.

Yet, when they nailed her coffin close,
They laid beside her there,
A broken ring, a withered rose,
And a little lock of hair !

A CITY CLERK'S CHRISTMAS DREAM.

THE office hours were ended

A little while ago,

And friendly and unfriended

Alike must homeward go.

Long since the noontide's high light

Died on the office skylight,

And dreary winter twilight

Was lost in gas-lit glow.

I tread the pavement crowded

With busy city men,

Whose souls dark veils have shrouded,

Woven by ink and pen.

Were but the veils once lifted,

The money-mist back-drifted,

What visions changed and shifted

Would rise before them then !

For me, my fancy ranges
O'er silent hill and plain ;
The noisy pavement changes
Into a country lane,
Where crushed dead leaves are lying,
And day and year are dying,
And winter winds are sighing
Their desolate refrain.

Past ghostly elms and beeches,
Past hedgerows gaunt and bare,
My yearning heart outreachest
Through frosty Christmas air
To her, to her, my treasure,
My only prize and pleasure,
Belovèd beyond measure,
And good beyond compare.

I thread the lanes and meadows,
I know each inch of way ;
'Twas here we saw our shadows
Cast by the moon of May.

With red, wet eyes that smarted,
Here at the church we parted,
Each almost broken-hearted,
The night I went away.

About her gate the roses
No more are sweet and red,
And all the snow discloses
Are rose-thorns brown and dead ;
But through her window gleaming
Her lamp's warm glow is streaming—
The star of all my dreaming,
Which here my steps has led.

Haste through the gate—go faster,
O feet, if that may be,
And bear your eager master
To where she waits for me ;
And haste, O longed-for hour,
Of all my life the flower,
When in her winter bower
Mine eyes my rose shall see !

Love, I am here—O vision,
Dead e'er it gained its crown !
But that is Fate's derision,
And this is Camden Town ;
And dreams of love's creating
Fly at my latch-key's grating,
And Christmas bills are waiting—
Good-evening, Mrs. Brown.

THE BELFRY.

HERE bells once swung their heavy tongues
And called the faithful in to prayer.
Climb up the ladder's shaky rungs,
And let us see what now is there ;
There now no clamorous bell's tongue swings,
But gentle, soft, warm wings.

The birds build in the belfry high—
In God's own house they make their nests ;
And we have watched them, you and I,
And envied their unruffled breasts,
And long to find some sure retreat,
And build our nest, my Sweet.

Yet since we may not build a nest
Within the church's shadow, dear,
It surely were not all unblest
To build a happy nest out here,
Where all the winds of heaven blow
And rose and heartsease grow.

THE CHILDREN.

SPRING!—almost summer! The winter's gone,
His reign is over, his hour is done!
Here's the crumpled green of the new-born leaves,
Here are baby-sparrows 'neath cottage eaves;
And the apple orchards are thick with bloom,
And the woods are gathering their summer gloom;
And the cottage gardens are gay and bright
With the wallflower brown and the rock-plant white;
And the heart of the risen year beats free
In meadow and forest, in flower and tree;
And beats in the prisoned hearts of men,
Till vaguely, vainly they long again
For the joy that is promised by every spring,
And which no summer can ever bring.
And the children wander by field and brake,
And clap their hands for the daisies' sake.

The bountiful summer laughs and throws
Her garment of green and her wreath of rose
Over great vile cities that men have raised,
Where her name is unloved and herself unpraised,
And only gold is counted of worth
Of all good gifts of the goodly earth.
And in this desert that men have made
Grow white-faced children that never played
With daisies and cowslips, nor laughed and lay
On the hot gray heaps of the scented hay—
The poor pale children who never have heard
The perfect song of an uncaged bird:
They never have gathered a single flower,
Or strayed through a wood for a single hour—
They sit in groups and they seem to *wait*,
Unfriended and hopeless and desolate.
Do they wait for the hero who is to come
To teach them the meaning of love and home—
To take them away from the heavy frown
Of the high black walls and the cruel town,
To where there is light and a rest from noise,
And love for the children of men, and toys?
Who is to save them? Ah! I and you
Have the chance and the choice this fair deed to do.

Where Gold is god, there the children must
Be ground 'neath his wheels in the bloody dust ;
But if Love be god—and a temple raised
Where gold shall be cursèd and love be praised—
When the temple is clean and the altar fair,
The children their garlands shall bring and bear
The first of all who shall gather there !

THE LOVERS' CHOICE.

WE walked, we two, in the early May,
Ere yet the oaks or the elms were green,
Hand in hand by a pleasant way,
Fresh-leaved hawthorn hedges between.
The sky seemed high as our hopes and dreams,
Our love was deep as the evening's peace ;
And we said : 'Our lives, where our love's light gleams,
What shall we do for the world with these ?

'We cannot sing and we cannot paint,
In science and letters we have no skill,
But we love sweet song, though our voice be faint,
And we love Art well, though we serve her ill.
And to love, it seems, is all we may do—
To love fair dreams, it is all we can !'
And as we spake, we came upon two
Who sat by the roadway—a woman and man :

A man and a woman, ragged and rough,
Dirty and desolate, idle and sad—
Faces lowering and coarse enough—
Bitter and brutal, base and bad.
They stupidly stared as we turned to pass
Sadly and silently, she and I,
When, with clouds of dust that made gray the
grass,
A man and a woman came riding by :

A woman lovely, weary and sweet,
Weary as he who sat by her side,—
From her proud fair face to her dainty feet
Lapped in luxury, clothed in pride.
Too rich for goodness—for joy too rich,
Kept warm from want in a shell of gold,
And the other woman, who crouched in the
ditch,
Cursed the carriage as by it rolled.

She cursed the two who went smoothly by
And idly noted the filthy tramp,
'A pest of decent society—
A leper to drive from the social camp.'

Fools, fools alike ! The sneering pair
And the cursing wretch in the wayside ditch !
O, you in your carriage, who put you there ?
Whose poverty pays life's price for the rich ?

The rich man wearies in all his state,
The poor man's heaven is vice and drink ;
Each weaves his own and the other's fate,
One cannot think, and one will not think ;
Each is of each a cause and a part,
And without the one must the other cease ;
Here is the work of our lives, my Heart,
To loose the fetters of such as these.

In the green hedgerow sang a happy thrush,
The east grew dappled with dreams of rain,
The red sun flamed through a blackthorn bush,
And the tramps slouched off down the narrow
lane—
Slouched through the beautiful world of flowers,
The world of remembrance, and love, and faith ;
Outrage to man, to this earth of ours,
A walking horror, a living death.

Then we said, 'Behold, we are young and weak,
And our only strength is the love we bear,
And this is our work, to see and to speak
 This message, always and everywhere :
"If some are rich, then must some be poor—
 If none were rich, then none poor need be !",
Ah, love, this key will unlock the door !
 The work is ready, for you and me !

SPRING.

‘THE spring is here !’ the primrose says ;
The birds exult—‘The spring is here !’
A veil of buds, desired and dear,
Is thrown across the lengthening days.

The furrowed field that was so brown
Is faintly gray with wee green spears,
Which shall be fruitful wheaten ears,
The golden autumn’s golden crown.

The sticky chestnut-buds unfold,
The almond-blossom pinkly gleams ;
The freshness of our childhood’s dreams
Is on the moor, the wood, the wold.

The fat, blithe blackbirds on the lawn
Rejoice to see the grass grown green ;
And starlings, where the thatched roofs lean,
Chatter in gray and windy dawn.

And spring is here—but with the spring
Come bitter winds, and cold, cold showers :
Will these not slay the wakening flowers
And stay the buds from blossoming ?

No—in despite of wind and rain,
The year will add to flowers new flowers,
Till summer comes with burning hours,
And all the roses live again.

And we—no chill that time can bring,
No icy wind of worldly scorn,
Shall ever make our souls forlorn
Of this sweet promise of the spring !

No cold, nor rain, nor wind is strong
To slay Hope's seed our hearts within ;
Freedom, we know, at last shall win,
Though Tyranny endures so long !

A DEDICATION.

IN any meadow where your feet may tread,
In any garland that your love may wear,
May be the flower whose hidden fragrance shed
Wakes some old hope or numbs some old despair,
And makes life's grief not quite so hard to bear,
And makes life's joy more poignant and more dear
Because of some delight dead many a year.

Or in some cottage garden there may be
The flower whose scent is memory for you ;
The sturdy southernwood, the frail sweet-pea
Bring back the swallow's cheep, the pigeon's coo,
And youth and hope, and all the dreams they knew—
The evening star, the hedges gray with mist,
The silent porch where Love's first kiss was kissed.

So in my garland may you chance to find
Or royal rose or quiet meadow flower,

Whose scent may be with some dear dream entwined,
And give you back the ghost of some sweet hour,
As lilies fragrant from an August shower,
Or airs of June that over bean-fields blow,
Bring back the sweetness of my long ago !

DAFFODILS.

WHEN life was young, and supple-strong
As any hazel bough,
We two, my sweetheart, walked along
By ways I tread not now ;
And though the woods were brown and rough,
The air was fresh and clear ;
We could not drink draughts deep enough
To pledge the new-born year.

The boxes on your window-sills
Were sown with mignonette ;
We used to gather daffodils
Where woods were wild and wet ;
The yellow of them, how it shone
Their blue-green leaves among—
Before the taste of life was gone,
When you and I were young !

They grew in sheets of cloth of gold
Above the tree-roots brown,
And you and I, by farm, and fold,
And field, went wandering down ;
The might of spring was in the air,
Her praise was on my tongue,
Her daffodils were in your hair,
When you and I were young.

I wonder if the daffodils
Grow goldly now, as then—
If still their flash of glory fills
The meadow, copse, or glen ?
I do not know, I only guess,
These bunches, tightly tied,
Of fading golden loveliness,
Once grew in golden pride ;

Not thick, green, juicy stalks, that bent
To turn the stately head
The way the wind's last whisper went ;
But thin stems, nearly dead,

Split at the ends, and curling up,
Torn from the kind, wet sod,
On which each bore its golden cup
And held it up to God.

These daffodils the flower-girls sell
Are only like in name
To those that decked the woody dell
With wreaths of pallid flame.
Ah ! do such grow—or did I dream
They used to grow ? Who knows ?
As lost as hopes, my dear, they seem,
And you as lost as those !

And I—the vigour and the life,
The freshness and the spring
That were to strengthen for the strife,
And bless me, conquering ;
Youth's dreams and hopes—the latent power
Of life, when life was May—
Dead—dead as ever a golden flower
We plucked and threw away !

THE MESSAGE OF JUNE.

WHEN baby June kissed dying May,
And on her shroud wild roses laid,
I passed where leafy woods were gay—
All gold, and green, and shine, and shade ;
With weary feet, and heart afraid
To tell itself how life was gray.

Aweary of the ways of men,
Aweary of my own way too ;
Tired to the soul of book and pen,
And what these do and will not do,—
I passed the beechen coppice through
And reached a hidden quiet glen.

Blue sky, gold sun, and pearl-white cloud
And wealth of leaves and lavish flowers,

What were they to a heart the loud
Rough world had claimed too many hours?
I felt I could not feel the powers
That are not felt among the crowd.

What could I care for bud or breeze,
Or any sweet the summer brought?
My heart was shut away from these,
Close wound in mummy-folds of thought,
Out of the reach of all that sought
To teach life's open mysteries.

Gone was my youth, and hope was gone,
And love with these had ceased to be :
Old, ill, unchangeably alone,
What word could summer have for me
That would not be a mockery,
Since all the sweets of life were done?

A blackbird whistled, and a bird
Far down the meadow made reply :
Then came a footstep, and I heard
A murmur and a slight light sigh,
And slowly passed two lovers by,
Without a single spoken word.

I saw them pass, and then I strove
Still to call summer vain, forsooth !
The summer laughed through all the grove,
Laughed, and declared the splendid truth,
The immortality of youth,
And the eternity of love !



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